DECEMBER 27 2025

FT Weekend Magazine

The Archive Issue

Legends, curios and unforgettable stories from the FT's depths

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FT Weekend Magazine
DECEMBER 27 2025

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FABRICE COFFRINI/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

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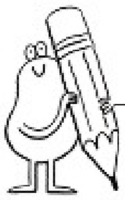

MARGINALIA *by* NADINE REDLICH

ON THE COVER
ILLUSTRATION *by* DAVID J McMILLAN

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Letters of 2025

THE FUGITIVE PRINCE (JANUARY 18)

by Miles Johnson

Chasing the rights to a fortune presumably pillaged from the Romanian people in the first place. Quite delusional. But at the same time a splendid read.

OTTOMANGREEK VIA FT.COM

THE SUCCULENT THIEVES (JANUARY 25)

by Monica Mark

Superbly written indeed. I have absolutely no interest in plants but this writing was so much more. Outstanding sociological observation. Good reporting. Exceptional piece!

MORELIGHT VIA FT.COM

CONFESSIONS OF AN ELITE SOBER COACH (FEBRUARY 1)

by John Phipps

Beautifully and sensitively written. As a person sober 40 years who has had a sober coach living in his home coaching his teenage son, it resonated deeply.

VIA CHRISOHRSTROM VIA FT.COM

ICEBREAKER (FEBRUARY 8)

by Rana Foroohar

I'm a current US maritime academy cadet and I was shocked by how great this article was. Great summary of the current big picture and the culture and appeal of going to sea.

LANDSLORDS4BIDEN VIA FT.COM

NEW SYRIA RISING (MARCH 8)

by Raya Jalabi

Time after time, figures like Ahmed al-Sharaa appear and we apply our own beliefs and expectations, living in very different societies, to measure their qualities and actions. Better to measure him against his predecessor and reserve judgment.

AVERY VIA FT.COM

THE RULES OF MODERN DINING (MARCH 22)

by Tim Hayward, Marina O'Loughlin, Jay Rayner and Jancis Robinson

One of the funniest, most accurate and entertaining articles I have read about food in ages. Thanks, all – the Avengers, the panel and (even) the BTL commenters. I agreed with lots, laughed at more and fumed at many rules and responses. Much more of this please.

PAULGARB VIA FT.COM

THE NOVELIST AND THE DETECTIVE (MARCH 29)

by Samantha Weinberg

Peter Grainger looked almost exactly as I pictured him! And his desk as well! I fanatically try and get any readers I know to pick up his *DC Smith* series.

HARDIN NIKKI VIA FT.COM

WELCOME TO SLOPWORLD (APRIL 19)

by Jacob Silverman

Excellent piece on the degeneracy of the internet. I increasingly think that shutting out all social media is important to retain sanity and focus. Having paid-for access – as with the FT – becomes a feature, not a bug.

MRTITUS VIA FT.COM

A MURDER REVISITED (APRIL 26)

by Nathan Brooker

Wonderful read. The atmosphere of rural England lingers – the intelligence and worldliness of John Cornwell, tucked up in his library, and the eeriness of Ted Hughes.

SWISSMISS VIA FT.COM

THE WILD WRITER (MAY 31)

by Edward White

This was beautiful. I love pieces that touch on the lives of ordinary people in China (and elsewhere).

BROCKTREE VIA FT.COM

SCION. CEO. SUPREME (JUNE 7)

by Kana Inagaki and David Keohane

Terrific piece. And pretty brave of a Nikkei-owned title to publish it. Would have loved to have seen some of the back and forth behind the scenes.

AUDERE EST FACERE VIA.COM

THE NEXT BIG ONE (JUNE 28)

by Pilita Clark

This piece is a welcome corrective to many who believe that the topic of climate change is overhyped.

ALASTAIR CONAN, SURREY

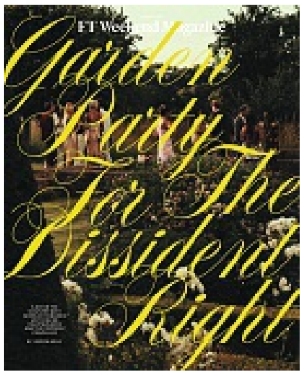
WHEN AN ASTEROID HITS (JULY 19)

by Tomas Weber

"What do you do?"
"I'm the head of planetary defence. What about you?"
How do you top that?

FLOTILLA OF DREAMS VIA FT.COM

FT Weekend Magazine
THE FUGITIVE PRINCE



FT Weekend Magazine
A Code Maker In Winter

LETTER-INSPIRING COVERS (FROM TOP): JANUARY 18, AUGUST 9, AUGUST 16

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THE ZELENSKYY WHISPERER (JULY 26)

by Christopher Miller

Excellent reporting, whatever you think of the man or Russia's invasion.

LOUIS FROM LEWES VIA FT.COM

WHY CAN'T I STOP CLEANING FAKE DIRT OFF FAKE OBJECTS? (AUGUST 2)

by Oliver Roeder

What a bizarre hobby, clearly the author is some kind of freak. Anyhow, time to settle in for four hours of *European Truck Simulator.*

KRAUTKIWI VIA FT.COM

RIGHTWING GARDEN PARTY (AUGUST 9)

by Jemima Kelly

Extraordinary. Very brave, Jemima. Apart from explaining your "skill", one might think you had inadvertently taken one of Yarvin's acid tabs and were tripping. The nearest the FT has come to gonzo journalism and I mean that as a deep compliment. Bravo.

THUMBSCREW VIA FT.COM

JIM SANBORN'S SECRET CODE (AUGUST 16)

by Oliver Roeder

One of those pieces you start reading and literally can't stop...

FLUFF-FLINGER VIA FT.COM

DESTINATION TOKYO (SEPTEMBER 6)

by Leo Lewis

Super-enjoyable piece. Hiring grads in Tokyo for a global bank I am struck by how high quality the Chinese graduates of Japanese universities are.

NSHK76 VIA FT.COM

BRITANNIA HOTELS (SEPTEMBER 13)

by Jennifer Williams

Excellent article and impressively thorough investigation. Resonances through the decades is such an important theme. Could help explain some of the frighteningly high turnout at protests. Living in areas where the visible decline of economies and communities is a daily insult, it's a short step to look for outsiders to blame.

DARTANIAN VIA FT.COM

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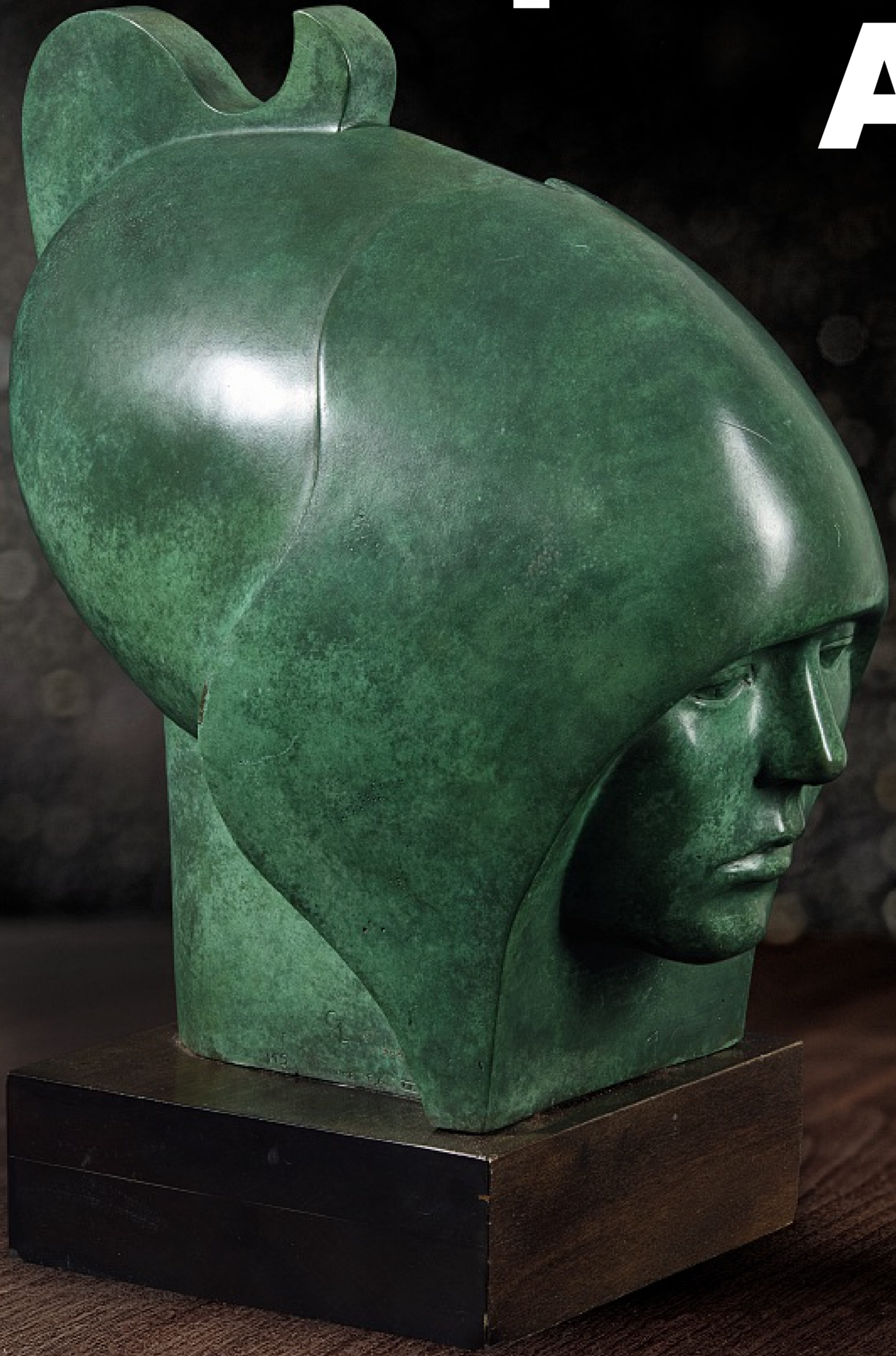

Contemporary Art

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GALINA X - 1977

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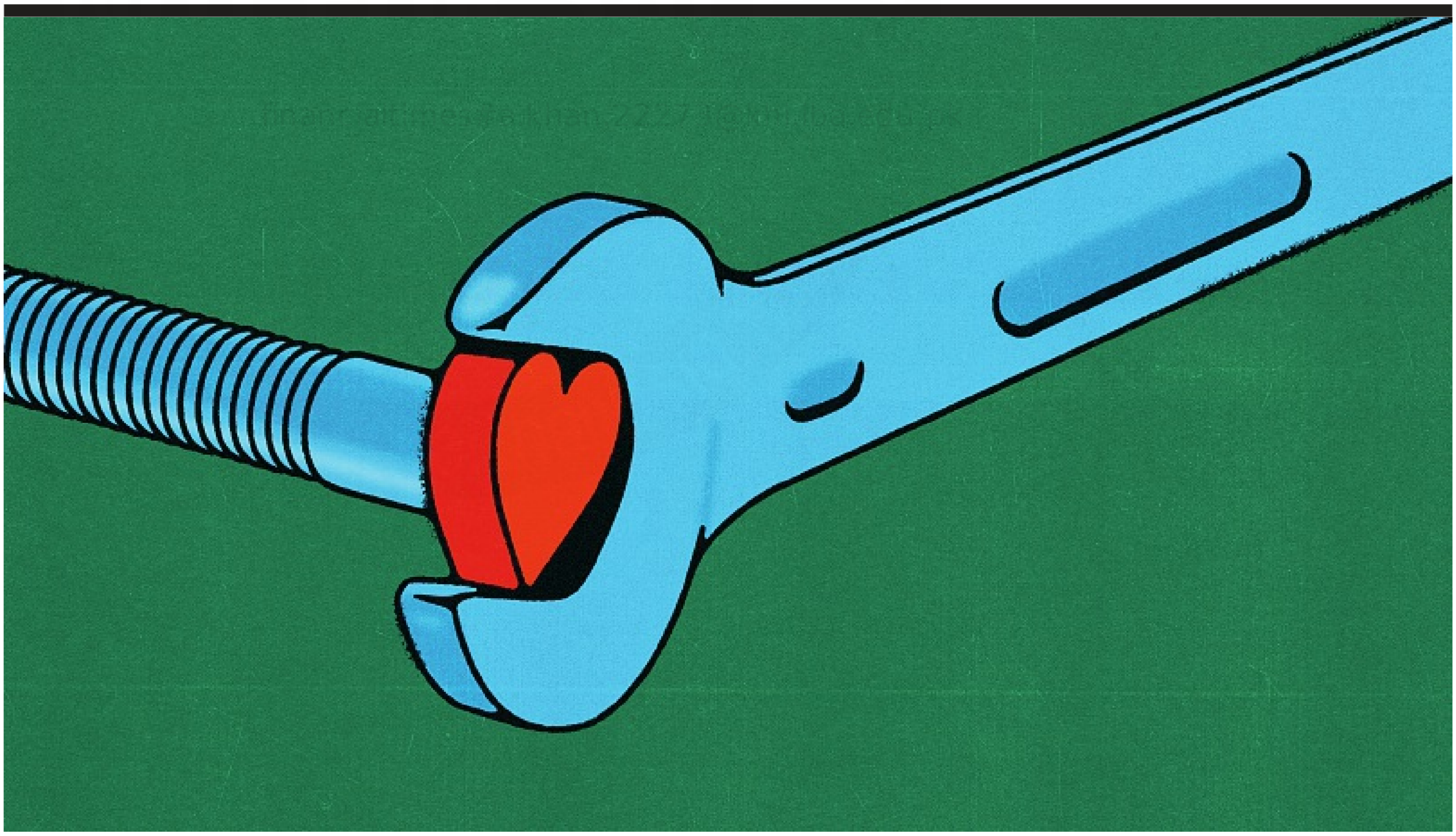
INSIDE Football’s goal-crazy day **P10**

Intellect



Undercover Economist

In praise of maintenance

by TIM HARFORD

ILLUSTRATION by ALBERTO MIRANDA

It’s the time of year to ponder self-improving resolutions, and I find myself consulting one of my favourite 87-year-olds: the visionary author Stewart Brand. But if Brand is right, perhaps self-improvement isn’t quite the right term; self-maintenance might be better.

“You can imagine I have a lot of experience and thoughts concerning self-maintenance these days,” Brand tells me. His new book is *Maintenance: Of Everything, Part One*. If he survives long enough to add a second part, he plans to include a photo “of all the teeth (natural and implants) that have fallen or been yanked out of my head over the years… I kept them all as incentive to keep up with my dental hygiene. It didn’t work.”

Maintenance is not a romantic subject. It can seem like an endless set of repetitive chores in which the best possible result is that you’re back where you started. We can be forgiven for wanting to cut some corners. Brand’s proposed caption for the photo of his double handful of lost teeth: “I brushed when I felt like it.”

Still, the topic is not up for negotiation. Buildings, machinery, vehicles and much more besides will soon become unusable if not cared for. No brushing, no teeth. No maintenance, no machine.

"Don't have time to schedule maintenance?" asks a cartoon drawn for the US Army, depicting a tyre bouncing to freedom away from a stricken armoured car. "Then your equipment will schedule it for you!"

The military fascination with maintenance is instructive. US Army doctrine uses the awkward but handy term "sustainment" for the broader task of keeping everything going. The old maxim is that an army marches on its stomach; that's true, and it's also a form of maintenance.

DICTATORS DISDAIN MAINTENANCE, argues Brand: they prefer the new and spectacular, which is one reason why the Russian military failed to overwhelm Ukraine in 2022. Brand argues that the Ukrainian military had rapidly embraced the improvisation, care and expertise required to repair and maintain their equipment, while the Russians had skimped on basics such as fuel – and tyres, which had been left to rot. When the Russian military machine was put to the test, the wheels fell off.

Then again, many democracies do not cover themselves in glory when it comes to maintenance, either. Investment spending is often neglected, and to the extent that politicians do direct money at boosting the stock of capital, they tend to prefer to build something new. They hope that whatever is old will somehow keep ticking over without attention. It won't.

> Politicians hope that whatever is old will somehow keep ticking over without attention. It won't

Tempting as it is to blame our governments for all this, not many of us do better in taking responsibility to maintain our minds, our bodies, our relationships and our stuff. We brush our teeth because we fret about stinky breath today; if we were confident of smelling minty-fresh in any case, and thought that tooth-brushing would only pay off in 20 years time, how many of us would bother?

All the more reason to find something to celebrate in maintenance. There is more to the matter than lost teeth and lost tyres and an endless, thankless grind of make do and mend. One of the best-selling philosophy books of all time, Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, finds a kind of spiritual wisdom in the practice of tending to a motorbike. It is not even the only philosophical tome written about motorcycle maintenance – Matthew Crawford's *Shop Class as Soulcraft* was a post-meltdown hit in 2009.

Maintenance is meditative – one of Brand's heroes, the great French philosopher/round-the-world-sailor Bernard Moitessier, told him "My rule is, a new boat every day." By that he meant that everything on his one-man boat should be as good as new; no repair job was so trivial that it could be postponed.

If that seems too earnest, consider three more truths about maintenance. First, it is often collaborative. There is even an ethnography of maintenance culture, and it focuses on conversation. Julian Orr, an anthropologist, lived among the photocopier repairmen of Xerox in the 1980s and 1990s. His book about their culture is titled *Talking About Machines*, because although these technicians typically worked alone, they loved to gather together and talk about complex repair jobs.

Photocopier repair is beyond most of us, but the same instinct applies whether the problem is a software glitch, a faulty washing machine or a garden pest: we seek advice and compare notes. Many manufacturers of complex products and services will direct troubleshooting requests to online communities of other users. That can feel like a frustrating piece of cost-cutting, but it is also a sensible reflection of the fact that it can take a village to fix a widget.

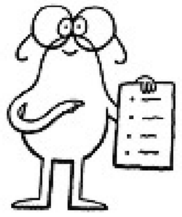
That reflects a second underrated fact about maintenance: good maintenance is often nothing like the chore of brushing teeth and washing dishes, but an intellectually demanding task requiring knowledge, intelligence and curiosity. To repair a complex object requires patient problem solving and the diligent discovery of hidden trouble. It is an act of mastery.

The third fact follows from the second: because maintenance can require deep expertise, learning to maintain something is empowering. That is true whether the thing in question is a motorcycle or a motorcycle club, or even your own body. Stewart Brand declares that the power to repair is the power to improve. He's right.

It sometimes feels that maintenance is a lost art: so many appliances are miniaturised and mass-produced that they become much simpler to replace than to repair. Still, this technological change cuts both ways: YouTube and large language models can assist with all manner of household maintenance tasks, and both manuals and spare parts are often easy to obtain online.

I can make no claims to be a maintenance guru, and am regularly baffled by the glitches of household appliances. But I've noticed that as I've passed through my forties and into my fifties, and my body has required increasing efforts at maintenance and repair, I've begun to enjoy the confidence boost that comes with understanding where the aches and niggles come from, and how to make them go away again.

Set aside all those self-improving resolutions, then. In 2026, I have a shallow-seeming plan with hidden depths: I'm going to try to maintain what I already have. FT



DEPARTMENTS

REPORTS *from* LESSER-KNOWN FT BUREAUX

TRADITION

A fixture of two halves

One reason why Boxing Day football fixtures gained popularity dates back to December 26 1963, when 10 top-flight matches produced 66 goals (the current average is around 30), including Fulham's 10-1 win over Ipswich, Burnley's 6-1 thumping of Man Utd and West Ham 2 Blackburn 8. In the reverse fixtures two days later, all three results were reversed.

SOURCE: THEFOOTBALLMINE.COM; VARIOUS

SELF-CARE

Great failed resolutions

Even the most successful people can have problems sticking to their new year plans…

- Samuel Pepys – To give up "wine, plays, and other expenses". Lasted a few weeks.
- Samuel Johnson – To rise "at eight or sooner", instead of staying in bed "till two". Revised to "to rise by degrees more early in the morning".
- PG Wodehouse – To learn the banjo. Banjo was pawned by a housemate, who lost the ticket.
- Katherine Mansfield – To keep a diary for posterity. Managed two months.

SOURCE: 'YOU'RE GOING TO BREAK ALL YOUR NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS BUT DON'T WORRY', COUNTRY LIFE

HISTORY

Preparing for the Y2K bug

Midnight. 01/01/00. As the Queen and Tony Blair held hands stiffly for "Auld Lang Syne", most IT professionals were quietly confident that nothing bad would happen. Martyn Thomas, who ran Deloitte's remediation efforts, believed that if their efforts had been insufficient faults would already have been occurring throughout 1999. "That wasn't happening, so it was clear we'd cracked it," he says. Just to be safe, though, he still brought in a stock of food and filled all the bathtubs in his house with water, so he'd have essentials in case something went terribly wrong. "But I emptied the baths as soon as the millennium was over," he says.

SOURCE: 'ALL PEOPLE COULD DO WAS HOPE THE NERDS WOULD FIX IT' BY TOM FABER, GUARDIAN

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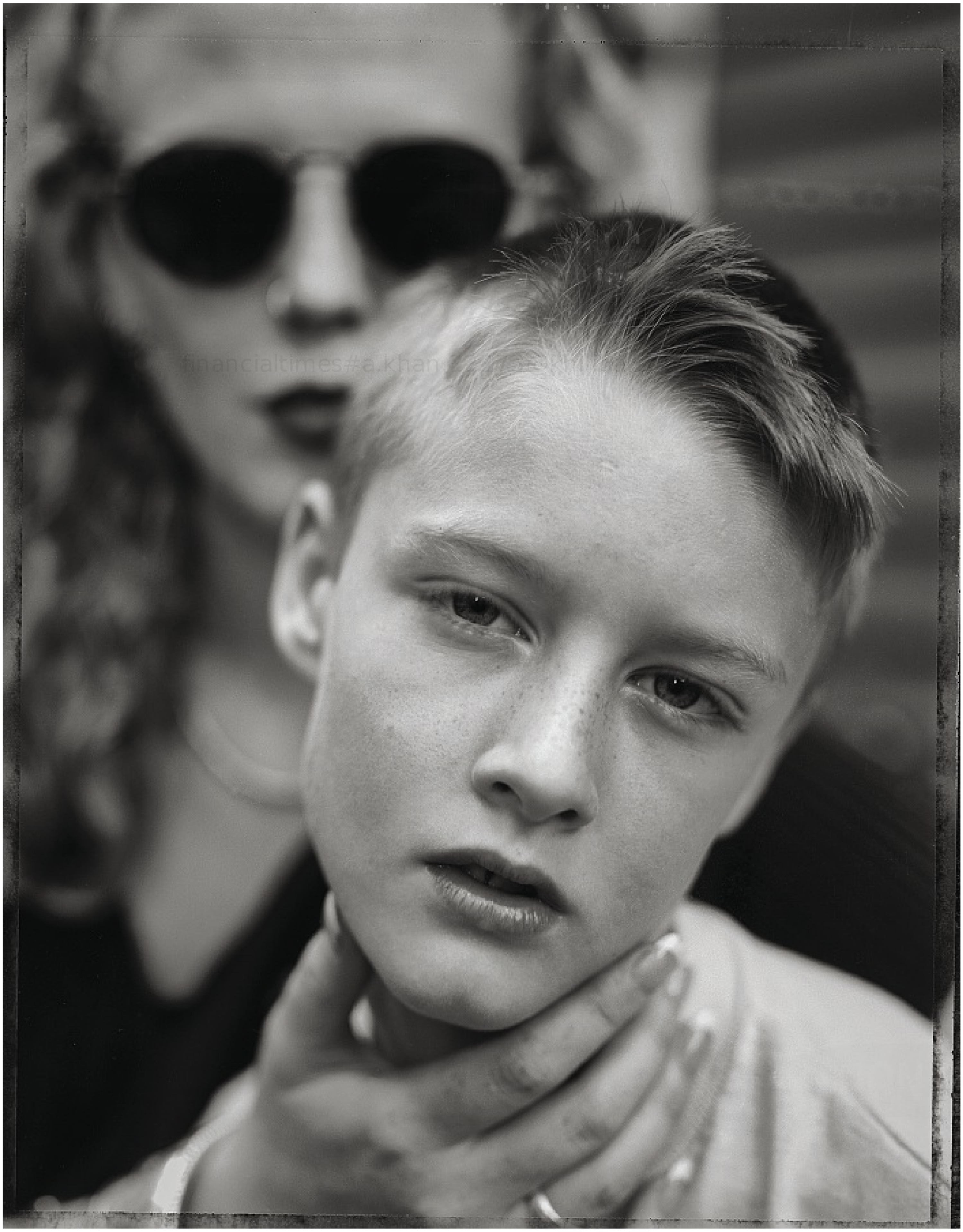

LAURA AND MATT, 1994.07.24, JUDITH BLACK
TALKING TO CAROL, 5/1995, DEANNA DIKEMAN

GALLERY

JUDITH BLACK & DEANNA DIKEMAN

by JOSH LUSTIG

Over nine months, Judith Black and Deanna Dikeman, both American Midwestern photographers who have made careers out of depicting their families, sent each other pictures from their archives. Instigated by the gallerist Alex Schneideman, the two photographers created a visual call and response that drew on thousands of images spanning decades. "We started this when I showed Deanna my photo of Rob sitting and holding an axe," Black tells me. "As soon as Deanna saw it, she exclaimed, 'I have one of my dad swinging an axe!'"

Not all of the responses were so obvious. Some were less about mirroring the content, whether through form or subject matter, and instead were more about an emotional response. The two images here – Dikeman's sent in response to Black's – are perhaps somewhere in between. "I often did go into my archive with a specific photo in mind," Dikeman tells me. "But just to be sure, I would also go through a big Lightroom folder of images for possible replies. Usually, I ended up with a response to Judy that was quite different from my first thought."

There's an unusual playfulness and looseness to the selections. "Many of the pictures that I used in this context, I would never find a place for in an exhibit or a book," Black says. Dikeman agrees: "I would first go to what I would call my 'greatest hits' and then I would say, 'Well that's OK, but I have this quirky picture that I've never used or shown, but it's the right answer to what Judy sent me.'"

The resulting exhibition is made up of 120 images and accompanying catalogue. Printed small, the photographs snake around the four walls of the gallery creating one long visual sentence. The juxtaposition creates new resonances, but the significance of the pictures to the photographers is not the same as that we might give them as viewers. We hear our own echoes between the two families, but also in the reflections of our own kin. As families blend and gather all over the world at this time of year, I find myself scanning my own memories of our family albums, thinking about what picture I might send back in response to one of these. I don't think I've ever seen my dad wielding an axe. FT

"Blended Families" is at Flow Photographic Gallery, London until February 28. The catalogue is available at flowphotographic.gallery

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ARCHIVIST'S NOTE

Dive into FT history with stories on the fall of a Russian power player; the great Chinese watermelon heist; the ghosts that haunted an inventor; a tale of falling in love, literally; the dance critic who broke hearts; and one very deliberate plane crash

ORIGIN
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A FALLING TSAR

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CHRYSTIA FREELAND

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ARCHIVIST'S NOTE

In autumn 2003, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Russia's richest man, was in his private jet, telling Chrystia Freeland about his fight with Vladimir Putin's Kremlin and how he was ready to go to jail if he had to. A few weeks later, that is exactly where he was

On a chilly day earlier this autumn, I was sitting in a rather kitschy, rustic-themed Russian restaurant in a park in St Petersburg with Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Russia's richest man, and a small group of executives from his vast Yukos oil company. Outside, the weather had turned gloomy. Inside, everyone was starting to relax after a few shots of vodka and not much to eat. When it was time for toasts, Ray Leonard, an American geologist who runs Yukos's exploration department, raised his glass, took a deep breath and launched into a carefully rehearsed speech: "This is the first time I have been to St Petersburg with Mikhail Borisovich," he said. "I have been reading a biography of Peter the Great. Peter the Great invited foreigners in and had to defend them against the locals. Three hundred years later, not that much has changed. Yukos is a small microcosm of the same process and I am proud to be a small part of it."

Khodorkovsky had the generosity to thank Leonard for his tribute, but he also had the humility to qualify it. After all, he explained, the real lesson of Peter the Great was tragic, not heroic. "We have to remember that under Peter the Great there were 24 million Russians and 300,000 of them died building St Petersburg. There were 2 million fewer Russians when Peter the Great died than there had been when he became tsar. We have developed quickly, and we have developed slowly, but in all this time, human life in Russia has not been worth even a kopek."

It was an admirable response and I didn't think it was particularly directed at me. But the episode made me wonder which force is more powerful in shaping Khodorkovsky's conduct today: the hubris of a man surrounded by fanatically devoted workers who routinely compare him to Peter the Great, or the idealism of a man who remembers that Peter the Great was a murderous autocrat? Is Khodorkovsky a crooked and vainglorious businessman who sought to undermine Russia's elected president, or is he a brave billionaire willing to risk his freedom and his fortune to stop Russia's slide into authoritarianism?

These questions have been posed even more urgently since early last Saturday morning, when the 40-year-old Khodorkovsky was arrested at gunpoint on charges of fraud and tax evasion and taken to Moscow's notoriously overcrowded Matrosskaya Tishina prison. The theatrical seizure was the climax of a four-month government campaign against the oligarch, whose personal fortune is estimated at $8bn and whose oil company controls reserves bigger than Kuwait's. Moscow, as ever, is awash with rumours and conspiracy theories, but on both sides of the Khodorkovsky affair there is little dispute about the fundamental reason for the arrest: parliamentary elections are scheduled for December, and presidential elections for the spring. The key to the state's efforts to control Russian politics ahead of these crucial votes is the conflict between Khodorkovsky, Russia's richest man, and President Vladimir Putin, Russia's most powerful man. Khodorkovsky is both a vast financial power and a growing force in civil society. The logic of Russian politics still calls for Putin to dominate both.

"Yukos is part of Putin's political game," the leader of one of Russia's liberal political parties told me. "He is against the independent position of anyone, including business. I think Yukos is important for Putin because he wants to show business that if you want to make money, you have to be loyal. If you are not loyal, you will be in prison."

Some think Putin is right. Bill Browder, an American fund manager who has been working in Russia for a decade, argued: "A nice, well-run authoritarian regime is better than an oligarchic mafia regime – and those are the choices on offer."

On top of this intense political battle, Khodorkovsky has also been at the centre of what was shaping up to be one of the world's biggest oil deals. This summer, he concluded Russia's largest merger, with oil company Sibneft, and began intense negotiations with ExxonMobil and ChevronTexaco about selling a stake in the combined enterprise for as much as $25bn. To see what his life was like at this extraordinary time, I joined

Mikhail Khodorkovsky is seen at Matrosskaya Tishina prison on a TV link during a court hearing in Moscow, January 15 2003

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him for two days in late September as he flew from Moscow to St Petersburg to address a meeting of Russian and American oil executives. At one point in his talk he called for the liberalisation of Russia's oil pipeline system – a cause the state has adamantly opposed. At the lunch after the speeches, Khodorkovsky spotted the head of Transneft, the state-owned oil pipeline company. Smiling broadly, Khodorkovsky called out: "So, how did you like my loyal speech?" The Transneft boss, red-faced and struggling with evident anger, shouted back: "If that was loyal. I'm a trolley bus." "So where are your headlights?" Khodorkovsky yelled back, miming flashing headlights with his hands cupped round his eyes. Loyalty to the Kremlin line, it was clear, had become for him something to be joked about. It is a joke he can now reflect on at leisure from the jail cell he was still in when this magazine went to press.

Putin sought a confrontation with the half dozen oligarchs who control the heights of the Russian economy as soon as he succeeded Boris Yeltsin as president in 2000. He summoned them for a meeting in the Kremlin to announce a new deal: they could keep the vast resources they had acquired during the Yeltsin era, but they would no longer be allowed to play the prominent role in politics to which they had become accustomed. For the past three years, that arrangement has held. The two oligarchs who couldn't bear to quit politics – Vladimir Gusinsky and Boris Berezovsky – were forced out of the country. The rest concentrated on business and became even more fabulously wealthy. Khodorkovsky, in particular, flourished, transforming himself from the bête noire of western investors to their poster boy.

Sometime this spring, however, Khodorkovsky began to drop hints that he would like to go into politics. He devoted more time and money to Open Russia, the non-profit organisation he founded in 2001 to promote civil society. He publicly admitted that he and other major Yukos shareholders personally contributed to two political parties, the liberal Union of Right Forces and the social democratic Yabloko. He also acknowledged that some prominent Yukos shareholders supported the Communists, Russia's largest political party. Riskiest of all, there were suggestions that Khodorkovsky might have even grander political ambitions. In dozens of interviews over the past five years, including one with me in 1998, he said he planned to retire from business when he turned 45. Everyone assumed he would then begin to enjoy his wealth. But as Khodorkovsky stepped up his civic and political activities earlier this year, commentators began to point out that his 45th birthday happens to fall in 2008, the year Putin is constitutionally obliged to step down, after two terms.

The observation seemed to be based on more than the usual gossip. Everyone in Moscow's political and business establishment has at least one story about a conversation with a senior Yukos executive in which Khodorkovsky's ambitions to become prime minister were floated. One of the two exiled oligarchs tells a more extreme version, claiming Khodorkovsky told him he had a meeting with Putin this spring in which the tycoon suggested a change in the Russian constitutional set-up. Russia, he told Putin, should become a parliamentary democracy, in which Khodorkovsky would be prime minister and Putin could have the prestigious, but more ceremonial, role of speaker. When I put this to him, Khodorkovsky refused to say anything about his alleged prime ministerial ambitions. However, he freely agreed that he favours a shift in power – a legal shift, he is at pains to insist – from Russia's near-tsarist presidency to something closer to the French system, with a more authoritative and stable prime minister.

Precisely who said what to whom within the high red walls of the Kremlin fortress as Khodorkovsky's political ambitions became more apparent is unclear. What is clear is that Yukos, and Khodorkovsky, came under increasingly heavy fire. On July 2 this year, Platon Lebedev, a big Yukos shareholder, was arrested. Since then, another major shareholder has fled to Israel and another has been charged with tax evasion and forbidden to travel abroad. Police have repeatedly raided the offices of Yukos, their lawyers, a PR firm working for a political party that Yukos backs, and even an orphanage sponsored by Yukos. Allegations against Yukos shareholders, and some employees, include murder and attempted murder, tax evasion and violations of the law during the privatisation of a fertiliser factory in 1994.

Yukos has robustly denied all the accusations, in particular the murder charges. "I can say with absolute authority that no one in our company is involved in contract killings, or was involved in them in the past," Khodorkovsky told me last month. "There were no contract killings." One of the most lurid of the cases is the murder of the mayor of the Siberian oil town of Nefteyugansk, who had been opposed to Yukos's plans for expansion and was shot dead on Khodorkovsky's birthday in 1998. For Moscow's myth-makers, the killing became whispered as a birthday gift to Khodorkovsky from a zealous underling. It hardly needs saying that Khodorkovsky formally disputed this charge. What was more interesting to me was that in informal conversation, his remembered horror at learning of the mayor's death seemed heartfelt and unrehearsed. He told me that his telephone rang at 8am. The call was from a Yukos employee and Khodorkovsky said he remembers it vividly – "how could I not?" The mayor had been shot. "Is he alive?" Khodorkovsky recalled asking. He still seemed a bit stunned by the reply: "How could he be alive! A whole glassful of his brains has spilled out." More softly, Khodorkovsky mouthed the final phrase a second time. It was an image, he said, he would never forget.

People hold pictures of Khodorkovsky as they protest against his arrest and imprisonment outside a court house in Moscow, December 22 2003

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OVER THIS SUMMER, AS RAID FOLLOWED raid, it seemed inevitable that the prosecutors would eventually reach Khodorkovsky. For that reason, the question uppermost in my mind when I met him was whether he would publicly capitulate by apologising to Putin for his political involvement and promising to stay out of politics in the future – or simply leave. A senior Yukos executive told me that after the first arrests in early July, Khodorkovsky considered doing just that. "We discussed full, unilateral surrender," the executive told me over supper at Shinok, a Ukrainian-themed restaurant in Moscow. "But we decided that it would be dangerous – it would be taken as a sign of weakness by our opponents in the Kremlin." Khodorkovsky has not looked back from that decision to stay and fight. A few hours after his imprisonment, his lawyer read out a statement from him: "I don't regret anything I have done: nor do I regret what has happened today."

Within the first few minutes of my seeing Khodorkovsky again, it was apparent that he was not for turning. He is a mild-mannered, soft-spoken and handsome man with rather gentle brown eyes, extremely clean hands and a tendency to giggle when nervous. When I first met him in the mid-1990s, he had an occasional stutter and, every once in a while, an inadvertent twitch, though with maturity and success these habits seem to have subsided. He is never without his thick glasses – these days they are the fancy, frameless variety – and makes a point of seldom wearing a suit and tie. If you met him at the home of a Russian friend, you might mistake him for a cerebral, slightly shy professor, probably of some technical subject such as applied mathematics or statistics. Like many powerful men, he has always liked to pretend he is slightly oppressed by his wife. Over tea in 1996 with Khodorkovsky and Inna, the dark-eyed woman he met when they were at university together, he complained of the starvation diets she imposed on him and the Russian classical music concerts she sometimes forced him to attend. But, of course, Khodorkovsky is neither a quiet professor nor a down-trodden spouse. He is a tycoon who has prospered in a business environment that is at once the most Darwinian and the most Byzantine in the world.

On our trip this autumn, we had barely sunk into the soft grey leather armchairs of the Tupolev-134 jet ferrying him and a few aides to the St Petersburg oil conference when he threw a newspaper down in disgust, exclaiming: "He [Putin] is breaking the constitution again!" On the ground, as his tinted-windowed black Mercedes SUV pulled away from the airport, Khodorkovsky shouted a triumphant "Yes!" into his mobile phone. It was a call from the Siberian city of Tomsk, where a court had just ruled in Yukos's favour in one of the hundreds of investigations the government is pursuing against the company at various levels. "It won't make any difference in the long run," Khodorkovsky admitted, "but it is nice to win sometimes."

As he entered the conference room in St Petersburg, another Russian oil baron commented on Khodorkovsky's extremely short new hairstyle. "I'm getting ready for them to throw me in jail," Khodorkovsky joked – sort of – with a steely smile.

Khodorkovsky always wanted to be a businessman – or the communist equivalent of one. From as early as he can remember, he wanted to be a Soviet factory director. In fact, he once told me, when he was just five years old the other children in his kindergarten nicknamed him "director" because becoming one was his frequently and clearly stated ambition. He had some advantages. He was born in Moscow: his father was an engineer and both of his parents worked at the Kalibr high-precision machine tools plant. But neither were members of the party elite, and his father was Jewish – usually a serious disadvantage.

Lacking family connections, Khodorkovsky had to make his own, which he did well. By 1986, when he graduated with a degree in chemistry from Moscow's Mendeleev University of Chemical Technology, he was deputy head of its Komsomol committee, the prep school for the Communist Party. As another Jewish oligarch told me in Moscow last month: "Khodorkovsky always had a talent for power. With a [Jewish] name like his, being deputy head of the Komsomol committee was a very difficult thing to achieve. If I had come home one day and told my parents I wanted to do that, they would have thought I was crazy."

A significant reason for his success was his respectful, almost humble, attitude towards his more powerful elders. Even by the late 1990s, when their swiftly acquired wealth had turned some of the other oligarchs into swaggering, ostentatious New Russians, Khodorkovsky was still careful to strike a modest pose. When the 68-year-old ex-Soviet spy, Yevgeny Primakov, briefly became prime minister in 1998, Khodorkovsky told me they quickly established a good working relationship, despite the huge gulf in age and life experience: "We were like a cat and a dinosaur. But with people of his age I always act respectfully and for that reason they always treat me well."

The most striking memory I have of the Khodorkovsky of this period was a comment he made over lunch with me and some colleagues in 1995. When we asked him what it was like to try to do business in a country that was just four years away from communism, his reply felt both authentic and astonishing. What we had to understand, he said, was that the state was still extremely important to business. How important? So important, he explained, that if the prime minister were to

Khodorkovsky poses for photographs in his private office in Moscow, Russia, in 2003

ask him to step down as head of his private bank, he would do so immediately.

But even as he learned to make friends in government, Khodorkovsky was also learning how to make money. Blessed by the Komsomol, and growing up in the relatively relaxed atmosphere of Mikhail Gorbachev's Soviet Union, the young student tried everything. He failed with a student cafe, got luckier importing computers. Later, his Menatep Bank made vast profits by exploiting the bizarre loopholes created by Russia's lurch from central planning to a market economy. Enriched by his banking operations, Khodorkovsky was poised to play for the jackpot: the bargain-basement privatisation of all Russia's industrial and natural assets. Just as Khodorkovsky had dabbled in dozens of businesses as a Komsomol entrepreneur, his Menatep group's acquisitions ranged from a titanium-magnesium plant near Moscow to textile mills, from glass factories to food-processing plants. But the real turning point – the transaction that multiplied his fortune from millions to billions and transformed him from a businessman to a tycoon – was the opaque and controversial privatisation deal known as loans-for-shares.

The 1995 loans-for-shares pact is one of the most shameful moments in post-communist Russia. In exchange for political support, the government granted control of the country's most valuable natural resources to a handful of businessmen, including Khodorkovsky, at a fraction of their market value. The asset transfer was little better than a give-away: in the loans-for-shares deal and an affiliated investment tender, Khodorkovsky's group paid $309m to gain control over a 78 per cent stake in Yukos.

ONE OF RUSSIA'S EVER-POPULAR QUESTIONS is: *Kto vynovat*? Who is to blame? For those Russians who are dissatisfied with the post-communist distribution of resources – and there are many, starting with the 30 million who live below the poverty line – the question of who is to blame begins with loans-for-shares. To this day, the Russian reformers who orchestrated the deal defend it as the only way to keep the communists out of power and to ensure that Russia became capitalist. As Yegor Gaidar, the mastermind behind Russia's market reforms, put it to me in 1998: "I understood the loans-for-shares programme perfectly well. The loans-for-shares created a political pact. They helped to ensure that [Communist leader Gennady] Zyuganov did not come to the Kremlin. It was a necessary pact." The complicity of the state in the loans-for-shares deal was hugely important in the making of the oligarchs, who are striving to be seen as the creators of a free market – and, indeed, of freedom itself – within Russia. But in the popular imagination, and in the eyes of Putin's prosecutors, the oligarchs are Slavic mafia dons, men who have bribed, stolen and even murdered their way into unimaginable riches. They are the capitalist exploiters that 70 years of communism inveighed against. This last accusation is true – the division of property was hugely unjust. But it is also false – the chief perpetrator of that injustice was the state, not the oligarchs.

The other large problem is that not all transactions were as black and white as the monster, state-sanctioned loans-for-shares deal. Most of the time the law, much of it still based on an anti-capitalist Soviet legal code, was obscure and contradictory. Enforcement was patchy and judges and apparatchiks were for sale. As Gaidar explained to me recently: "Of course, there were violations, but mostly it was lack of clarity of the law. The law was just being formed." These days, western investors are on a hunt for a "clean" oligarch, someone with whom they can do business, confident he won't be accused of fraud, or even murder, the next day. But veterans of the Moscow scene believe that search is futile. When I asked Bill Browder, whose Hermitage Capital is the largest public equity fund in Russia, with about $1.2bn under management, whether he could be certain that any big Russian businessman was absolutely pure, he smiled widely and offered a one-word answer: "No." Stephen Jennings, head of Renaissance Capital and another Russia hand, was only slightly more circumspect when I stopped by his Moscow office. "There are no rich angels in Russia," he told me. "Everyone has broken a lot of laws and done a lot of bad things to get the assets they have. A lot of people were killed in a lot of different industries. With most of the big assets, there were some deaths."

The Russian business world is undeniably a rather dangerous place – when the Yukos jet landed, the flight attendant came round with a transparent plastic bag of revolvers for the bodyguards in one hand and coats in the other – but the oligarchs all deny using violence as a business tool. What they will admit to is pushing Russia's patchy legal system to maximum personal advantage. In one high-profile example, Mikhail Fridman, an oligarch who this spring pulled off Russia's deal of the year with his sale of a 50 per cent stake in his TNK oil company to the British oil major BP, used Russian bankruptcy laws to acquire a valuable oilfield. His tactic, he recently assured me, was "legal" but also "very aggressive" and "perhaps… not absolutely within the framework of the spirit [of the law] in its international conception".

KHODORKOVSKY IS BOTH A VAST FINANCIAL POWER AND A GROWING FORCE IN CIVIL SOCIETY. THE LOGIC OF RUSSIAN POLITICS STILL CALLS FOR PUTIN TO DOMINATE BOTH

Khodorkovsky was another aggressor and – to the surprise and outrage of some analysts – he was not afraid to tangle with western investors. Acquiring Yukos was just the first step. Yukos itself was a holding company, made up of oil production subsidiaries that controlled the oilfields themselves. Yukos's ownership of these subsidiaries was only partial. To make it a company worth owning, Khodorkovsky needed to establish absolute control over its subsidiaries. There was one big hitch: some shares in the subsidiaries had been sold off separately in earlier privatisation rounds. Western financial investors, spotting an opportunity to buy Russian oil assets cheaply, had been among the most zealous buyers. Khodorkovsky needed to get them out. "When Khodorkovsky was the bad boy of western corporate governance the reason he was the bad boy was that a bunch of people owned his stock and he didn't want them owning it," Browder explained to me as we sat on a packed flight from London to Moscow.

Khodorkovsky proceeded to do so with an aggression and cunning that stunned even the normally unflappable Moscow business community. Minority shareholders were threatened with massive dilution; a complex web of mysterious offshore companies was created; technical or physical roadblocks were thrown up to prevent the dissident investors from voting at key shareholder meetings. All of this happened just as some of his rival oligarchs were beginning to worry about their reputations abroad: they were courting western strategic investors and planning share listings in London or New York. They were brushing up on their English, hiring expensive western PR companies, and learning to pepper their public conversation with phrases such as "transparency" and "western corporate governance". Khodorkovsky hired PRs too, but his bottom-line calculation was simple and ruthless. First, he needed to get control of the company. Later on, he could worry about his image in the west. Within five years, one Yukos executive predicted to me at the height of the conflict, everyone will have forgotten about this.

He turned out to be exactly right. Today, there are still a lot of people around who hate Khodorkovsky. But everyone agrees on one thing: the Khodorkovsky of 2003 is an outstanding business manager – the best in Russia – and Yukos is Russia's most transparent, best-governed company. It has even inspired a new word, "yukosisation", the process whereby a poorly managed, opaque Russian company cleans up its act. "Yukos is head and shoulders above the rest," Browder said. "Everything they do is better. The company is fixed."

Khodorkovsky arrives to speak to the media at his first press conference since his release from a Russian prison two days earlier, on December 22 2013

IN THE FIRST FEW MONTHS AFTER TAKING OVER YUKOS HE FIRED THOUSANDS OF HABITUAL DRUNKS. HIS RULE IS THAT 90 PER CENT MUST BE SACKED

Khodorkovsky did two big things to fix it. First, he improved the way it did its work, and second, he improved the way it treated its investors. When Russians are serious about technical reform, they have a knack for marrying imported western know-how with home-grown ferocity – think of Peter the Great, or Joseph Stalin. This slightly scary combination is in evidence everywhere in Yukos, whose gleaming Moscow headquarters are crawling with keyed-up, red-eyed foreigners. The ones who last – and many don't – have learned to love what one of them, Ray Leonard, likes to call "the extreme sport" of the oil industry.

When Leonard, the Texas-trained geologist who compared Khodorkovsky with Peter the Great, first arrived three years ago, he remembers being horrified to discover that a rival team would always be assigned to work on the same project he was given: "A western manager would look on it as a gross betrayal of trust." Now, Leonard sets up the same unforgiving internal competitions within his own department. "Monday morning staff meetings are like internal warfare," Leonard told me with a tired smile – he had been in a meeting with Khodorkovsky until 2am the previous night. At one of these public sessions, Leonard's boss "got really pissed at me and called me something that related to a sexual dysfunction". It was, Leonard said with a wistful smile, a terrific moment: "It meant I was one of them."

Khodorkovsky himself doesn't much shouting. But he admits to an "authoritarian" management style. He has been ruthless about getting rid of Soviet-era working practices and he systematically monitors his workforce. In the late 1990s he told me he had installed closed circuit TV cameras in one enterprise and he is unsentimental about firing those who don't make the grade. One example, which he called up on his laptop computer as we flew back to Moscow from St Petersburg, is the weekly report his security service compiles for him on the number of Yukos workers found drunk on the job. In the first few months after taking over Yukos, he fired thousands of habitual drunks, a significant number even in Yukos's massive workforce of more than 100,000. For the week in mid-September which he clicked open on his screen, there were just 27. Of these, Khodorkovsky's rule is that 90 per cent must be sacked.

HIS SECOND BIG DRIVE HAS BEEN TO CLEAN up Yukos's corporate governance and its treatment of shareholders. He brought in a western chief financial officer, cut a deal with his minority investors and prepared company accounts that met international standards. I saw the change in 2000, when Khodorkovsky came to see me in my office in London. At the end of our conversation, he asked to use my computer. Within seconds, he had called up the Yukos share price and – with a whoop of joy – summoned his entourage over to take a look at how much it had risen that day.

Khodorkovsky was the first oligarch to officially declare the size of his personal shareholding and that of his partners. According to Browder, there are no corporate governance issues at Yukos left to sort out: "You can get right down to the details and see what is happening." Khodorkovsky's two-pronged restructuring campaign has been remarkably successful. Yukos's production costs plunged by two-thirds and its share price rose sharply. This spring, before the political furore, Yukos and Sibneft accounted for more than two-thirds of the rise in the Russian stock market over the past three years. Five days before Khodorkovsky was arrested, Yukos reported forecast-beating second quarter net profits of $955m, up 26 per cent on the previous year.

Yukos's transformation gave Khodorkovsky celebrity in Russia, and respectability in the west. When Yukos celebrated its 10th anniversary as a company this year a roll-call of global oil executives – Exxon's Lee Raymond, Chevron's David O'Reilly. BP's Lord Browne – sent letters of congratulation. Khodorkovsky has met Condoleezza Rice and is on first-name terms with the US ambassador. When BP was searching for a Russian partner in the summer of 2002, Khodorkovsky was interested, but only on his own terms, insisting on keeping control of the company. He didn't need to sell out, because his success in turning Yukos around had inspired Khodorkovsky to set himself a new goal: he wanted to create Russia's first multinational company. "I know how I will finish my business career," Khodorkovsky told me. "I will build the best company in Russia and I will strive to make it international."

The reasons for Khodorkovsky's conversion from a quietly well-connected, aggressively apolitical tycoon to outspoken democratic activist are something of a mystery, even to the man himself. The best I could get from him was the observation that "Yes, I was once absolutely different in this respect, but people change with time, they mature." Some of the oligarchs have turned to the traditional rich man's pastimes of international celebrity and conspicuous consumption. But Khodorkovsky is moderate in his personal tastes: he takes his family on holiday to Finland, and lives in a house that wouldn't be out of place in most upper-middle-class suburbs. He thinks inherited wealth is soul destroying and told me he plans to leave only a million or so to each of his four children. Instead, Khodorkovsky decided his second career would be giving Russia back the money he made during his first.

Khodorkovsky's decision has honourable precedents: he cites as models the American 19th century robber barons, as well as modern-day philanthropists such as Bill Gates. Like them, he is ploughing money into civic good works, ranging from internet access for rural libraries to foreign exchange programmes for Russian students. But in Russia's fledgling democracy, civic activity has political implications. Khodorkovsky has exacerbated those by becoming directly involved in politics, openly funding political parties and supporting the decision of some key Yukos shareholders to run in the December parliamentary elections.

It is hard to judge today what Khodorkovsky and his partners were hoping to achieve. Was he, as his critics allege, trying to win control of a powerful parliamentary bloc in the upcoming elections and make himself Russia's political master? He might have been - and he certainly has the chutzpah to have tried. But whatever Khodorkovsky's true motives, the first Yukos arrest on July 2 changed everything. That day, Khodorkovsky's second career hardened into an almost messianic mission: he would not capitulate to the Kremlin hardliners and he would devote himself to building a political alternative to their rule. The mystery I kept coming back to during the time I spent with Khodorkovsky was why he wouldn't simply give up his political projects. It seemed to be the only way he could be sure of keeping his company, and keeping out of jail. But no matter how many different ways I put the question, his answer was always equally adamant: "I recall now our discussions with the president and absolutely agree that businesses cannot and should not participate in politics. But, at the same time, according to our constitution, I have the same civil rights [to participate in politics] as other citizens. As long as I have strength I am ready to fight the view that I must renounce my civil rights to guarantee my private property. I do not think that such a policy of appeasement is correct. Everyone knows how it ends. In 1929 and in 1917 people thought, 'let's compromise'. It ended with 5 million killed and tens of millions in prison. Our White officers fled the country, not wanting to fight for their rights at home. And how did it end? If they had stayed and fought, perhaps 30 million of their fellow citizens would have lived."

For all his protestations, it is still hard to see Khodorkovsky as Russia's modern day Andrei Sakharov. His commitment to civil society is relatively new, and may be as much about personal glory as it is about the national interest. But on our flight back to Moscow, he told me he was ready to go to jail, if that's what it took. He was still young and rich. At some point, they would have to release him and then he would carry on his battle. Several leading Russian politicians, businessmen and Yukos executives told me Khodorkovsky had said the same thing to them. Most of them predicted that his bravado would not last many hours in a crowded, tubercular prison cell. Only one person thought he would hold out. A rival oligarch told me: "All of us [oligarchs] are used to taking great risks, whereas Putin is not the world's most decisive person. For Putin, putting Khodorkovsky in jail is frightening. He is young, eventually he will get out, and then Putin will have a very rich opponent with a personal animus against him. If he puts Khodorkovsky in jail, he almost has to shoot him." FT

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CHINESE LOOK OUT FOR A THUMPING GOOD MELON

AUTHOR
ROBERT THOMPSON

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ARCHIVIST'S NOTE
Each evening, millions tuned in — not for crime or scandal, but for fruit. China's summer obsession then was the humble watermelon. Juicy, ubiquitous, occasionally criminal. For even in paradise, someone always tries to steal the harvest

EACH NIGHT THIS SUMMER, MILLIONS of Chinese are gathering around television sets for a report that serves as basic a function as the weather forecast... the watermelon wrap-up.

It is high season for watermelons, and the streets of Peking, the Chinese capital, are lined with watermelon men thumping melons to prove to passers-by, who will consume nearly one watermelon a day and sometimes much more, that they are of the best quality. The Peking municipal government estimates that the city's 9m population will eat 250m kg of watermelons during the summer. Families watch the television report in the eager way that a stockholder scours the share lists of a financial newspaper in the west.

TRAIN ROBBED

Chinese work units have begun to enter into the spirit of the season by providing workers with a "watermelon allowance". If a work unit does not have the connections to obtain good melons on the cheap, it will give staff a cash subsidy.

One Peking newspaper sent trucks deep into the countryside to provide workers with 25 watermelons each, although the melons were sold by the farmers on the condition that the newspaper's staff collected the seeds and returned them to the farm.

The big news this season has been the "great train robbery", and the fate of Lao Guixing and Zhang Minghua, the masterminds of the watermelon heist.

Several weeks ago, Lao and Zhang led 160 fruit vendors in an assault on a fully-laden train at Peking's Yongdingmen station.

The gang members, some of whom rode to the scene on pedicabs, stole 25 tonnes of watermelons. But, a few days later, Lao and Zhang were caught, paraded on television with their heads shaved, and given life sentences for their crimes.

The watermelon season has gradually become more of an event since China launched its economic reforms in late 1978, and allowed farmers to control crops.

Local farmers say bad weather has reduced the crop slightly this year, and prices are certain to rise from the 80 US cents that it takes to buy a quality melon.

One melon man, Xiao Liu, who sells from the back of a bicycle trailer in the east of Peking, claims to earn about $700 a month, which is more than twice the average annual urban wage in China.

He explained the complex art of picking a good melon: when thumped, the ideal thick-skinned model will give off a dull thud and not too many vibrations.

Xiao Liu goes in for the hard sell. Showing the flair that China now encourages, he has painted on his melons the characters for "extra special quality". He also showed his skills with a knife in what Chinese call "killing a melon".

GARLIC CROP

While Xiao Liu has done well out of economic reform, a group of garlic farmers from Cangshan, in Shandong province on the north coast, recently showed their displeasure with the way local officials were managing the reforms by storming the local government building armed with garlic.

The garlic crop in the region has been too successful and, according to the official China Legal News, the problem has been exacerbated by sloppy distribution by local officials, with the result that garlic prices have plunged.

An angry farmer and his wife rode to the government building in a cart full of garlic and told officials that they came bearing gifts. The couple then began throwing garlic around the offices, and were soon joined by other irate farmers in what the Chinese press has dubbed "the Cangshan garlic incident".

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THE GENIUS AND THE GHOST

AUTHOR
SAM KNIGHT

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ARCHIVIST'S NOTE

Nylon was the world's first synthetic fibre, and its runaway success helped define postwar America. But this triumph of chemistry sprang from a fragile mind, and a year before its launch to a standing ovation in New York, its inventor took his own life. More than 70 years later, his legacy continues to cast its shadow over the daughter he never met

American chemist Wallace Carothers works in his laboratory at DuPont's experimental station

By her own admission, Jane Carothers Wylen has no head for dates. That's not how her mind works. Her memories are more like images, which she searches for details that allow her to place an event in the chronology of her life. The end of the second world war, for instance, coincided with Wylen's first summer at camp, in Maine, when she was seven. (She stood in a crowd of children listening to the radio of a station wagon.) The Challenger shuttle disaster happened while she was living in Albany, in upstate New York. (She rode in a freight elevator that day.) Thinking this way has also allowed her to place the moment when she realised that her father, whom she never knew, must have been a murderer, and hanged for his crime. She was sitting on her bed in her childhood home in Wilmington, Delaware, when the thought struck her. "I just remember that moment," she says. "It couldn't have been natural causes." She was probably about eight.

WYLEN'S FATHER WAS NOT A MURDERER, and neither was he hanged. He was Wallace Hume Carothers, the inventor of nylon, the world's first synthetic fibre, and of neoprene, a kind of synthetic rubber. These inventions helped the Allies win the war, caused riots in department stores and sustained DuPont's position as one of the world's largest chemicals companies. (When it sold its textiles business in 2004, nylon was still making around $1bn a year in revenue.) But the eight-year-old Wylen was right about one thing: her father had not died of natural causes. After several years of worsening mental illness, in April 1937, two days after his 41st birthday, Carothers killed himself. This was seven months before his daughter was born and more than a year before his greatest work was made public. As America and the rest of the world embraced the plastics revolution (sales of synthetic fibres overtook natural ones in the US in the 1970s), Carothers' widow and daughter stayed in the quiet vacuum that he left behind, living off a stock bonus awarded on his death and attending DuPont ceremonies. "We stayed at the Waldorf Astoria and I had to stand on a chair," said Wylen of one such occasion. "My mother maybe had to say a few words… 'Here's the daughter,' or something."

Over the years, the company veered between veneration and denial of one of its most influential minds. Many of the records relating to Carothers' work survive only because two women in the DuPont archives ignored instructions to destroy them in the 1960s, and little was known about him and the rest of the nylon research effort until the 1980s, when two historians, David Hounshell and John Kenly Smith, pieced together the story. Even then, almost 50 years after his death, they found that Carothers remained the ghost of DuPont, his story a Depression-era fable of success, sadness and guilt. A number of people, for instance, claimed that on the night before he died, Carothers had come to their house, but they had been out. "More than one person told me… 'If only we had been home,'" Smith, a professor at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania, recalled. "The suicide really was a tremendous embarrassment. You still hear it repeated: this is what happens when you get a really creative person in an organisation. It kills him."

DuPont came looking for Carothers, a 31-year-old Harvard chemistry instructor, in 1927. Since 1918, the company had been spending the conspicuous profits it made from munitions in the first world war to refashion itself as a more diverse, consumer-friendly chemicals company. It took a 35 per cent stake in General Motors and moved into the promising world of rayon, cellophane and celluloid – semi-synthetic materials derived from naturally occurring cellulose.

Then, in 1926, DuPont set out to build its own team of academic research scientists. Drawing on the examples of AT&T and General Electric, whose in-house research laboratories had produced coast-to-coast voice transmission and the tungsten-wire light bulb, Charles Stine, the director of DuPont's chemistry department, suggested a programme of "fundamental research", in which DuPont would seek not to invent new products but to understand the basic science behind them. He told the company's executive committee that he would recruit "men of exceptional scientific promise but no established reputation. In this case, the nature of their work can largely be determined by us." The most important research was to be in organic chemistry. After a nine-month search, Stine thought he had found the man to lead it.

But Carothers, who had a reputation as an original thinker with a rare grasp of new chemical literature, initially turned him down. Stine raised the salary by 20 per cent and dispatched a deputy to Cambridge, Massachusetts, with orders to stay there until Carothers accepted. But it wasn't attention or money that worried the chemist. In a letter explaining his first refusal, Carothers acknowledged that, from a research point of view, both Harvard and DuPont had their merits. What concerned him was his personality, his ability to adapt to an industrial setting after life in the more esoteric, less pressured world of academia. In a frank admission for a time when understanding of mental illness was, at best, rudimentary, Carothers wrote: "I suffer from neurotic spells of diminished capacity which might constitute a much more serious handicap there than here."

After his death, his mother, Mary Evalina, described "the dark moods that assailed and engulfed" her son as if he had always had them – but his father, Ira, with whom he had a difficult relationship, said he had never been aware of his son's depressions. Whenever these dark moods first occurred, the narrative of Carothers' youth is of a slow, tortuous escape. He was born in 1896 and raised in Des Moines, Iowa, the eldest of four children in an arch-Presbyterian household. His father, bald, moustached, and frighteningly dour in the photographs that survive, was the vice-president of a commercial college. Despite his son's teenage fascination for the recent discoveries in radioactivity and the structure of the atom, Ira enrolled Carothers for a year of shorthand and penmanship classes after high school, then sent him to a small, Presbyterian college in Tarkio, Missouri, largely as a favour to the church elders. Once away from home, however, Carothers quickly gravitated to the college's basement chemistry laboratory, and was teaching other students before his own graduation.

Throughout Tarkio, and at the University of Illinois, where he spent six years working on his doctorate, Carothers was a kind of innocent romantic. His closest college friend, Wilko Machetanz, described him singing, reading widely, and endlessly memorising poetry – most of it melancholy. "The Garden of Proserpine", by Swinburne, was a favourite, and Carothers would tell his room-mate about the goddess of death as he fell asleep: "She waits for each and other. She waits for all men born." He was popular, if oddly grave, and suffered from hyperthyroidism, a hormonal condition that would make him agitated, hungry and tired.

At Tarkio, Carothers was nicknamed "Prof", something Machetanz put down to his slight stoop and glasses, and at Illinois the other students called him "Doc" long before he had his PhD. In his early twenties, Carothers' letters mixed the excitement of intellectual discovery – at Illinois he found his love for chemistry "not rational, but arising spontaneously from the profoundest depths of being" – with lyrical passages about his periodic depressions and what it was all supposed to mean. "Dreams out of the ivory gate: and visions before midnight," Carothers wrote to Machetanz, quoting Thomas Browne, the 17th-century English physician and writer. "I wonder if they will ever come true, any of them." There was a rumour at the University of Illinois that Carothers always carried a cyanide pill.

THERE WAS A RUMOUR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS THAT CAROTHERS ALWAYS CARRIED A CYANIDE PILL

IN FEBRUARY 1928, STINE prevailed, and Carothers took up the job at DuPont. As soon as the younger man arrived in Wilmington, he knew he had made the right choice. Freed from teaching, he cycled to the Experimental Station each morning, up on a tree-topped hill, and thought up problems to solve. "Nobody asks any questions as to how I am spending my time or what my plans are. Apparently, it is all up to me," he wrote. He quickly chose to work on polymers, a perfect field for DuPont to explore and one practically unstudied in the US at the time.

Polymers are long chains of large molecules and one of the key building blocks of life: wood is a polymer, silk is a polymer, protein is a polymer, DNA is a polymer. In the late 1920s, their structure and chemical properties were highly disputed. Until then, the vogue among German chemists, the best in the world, had been that polymers were agglomerations of small molecules held together by as yet poorly understood "colloidal" forces. But in 1926, Hermann Staudinger, an unfashionable, 45-year-old chemist, astonished a conference in Dusseldorf by apparently presenting proof that polymers were actually made of enormous "macro-molecules" held together by ordinary molecular bonds. "We were as shocked as zoologists might be if they were told that somewhere in Africa an elephant was found who was 1,500ft long and 300ft high," one delegate said. Staudinger's ideas remained so controversial that he did not win the Nobel prize until 1953.

Carothers, who read German and was familiar with Staudinger's work, suggested to DuPont that he set about proving the existence of these macro-molecules by building them from scratch. "The idea would be to build up some very large molecules by simple and definite reactions in such a way that there could be no doubt as to their structures," he wrote.

For more than two years, this is what Carothers did. Working in the library, using the technical penmanship taught by his father holding a pencil between his index and middle finger, Carothers envisioned a multitude of reactions that might produce longer and longer molecules. Most of the work took place in his head. "Carothers read from the depths of organic chemistry such as I have never seen," said Elmer K Bolton, who took over Stine's chemistry department in 1930. In 1929, Carothers sketched out most of his ideas in an article for the Journal of the American Chemical Society, a piece of work that, along with a second article published in Chemical Reviews in 1931, laid the basis for much of modern polymer science. His theories, along with a new language of "recurring units", "end groups" and "copolymers", survive today. "After that article, the mystery of polymer chemistry was pretty well cleared up," said Carl Marvel, Carothers' supervisor at Illinois.

Carothers' ideas came good in the laboratory in the space of a remarkable fortnight in April 1930. First, one of his assistants, Arnold Collins, found a new substance in a test tube that he had left on a bench for a week. Under Carothers' guidance, Collins had been trying to remove impurities from a compound called divinylacetylene, which DuPont thought might contain a polymer similar to isoprene, found in natural rubber. On April 17, Collins realised he had it: polychloroprene. DuPont's synthetic rubber, which was marketed as neoprene from 1936, prompted 400 newspaper editorials when it was announced in late 1931, and became a critical part of the Allied war effort when it replaced natural rubber, then unavailable from Asia, in boot soles, gloves and wire insulation.

Carothers never claimed much credit for the largely accidental discovery of neoprene. More important was a moment, around 10 days later, that validated his ideas about polymers and led, five years later, to the invention of nylon. Until this point, Carothers had not been trying to make a synthetic fibre; he had been trying to make ever larger molecules. He and his close friend and assistant Julian Hill had been doing this by preparing "esters" – simple chains that form from reactions of acids and alcohols – but they had hit a limit at molecular weights of around 4,000 to 6,000, the previous record for a synthetic molecule. Carothers guessed that the problem was caused by water in the later stages of reaction, so he adapted a piece of laboratory equipment, called a molecular still, to draw it off.

On April 28 1930, after 12 days of work with the new technique, Hill found what he later described as "a festoon of fibres" with molecular weights of more than 12,000. He dipped a glass rod into the polymers and, to his surprise, the fibres began to align and become stronger as he pulled them out – a phenomenon known as "cold drawing", and a key virtue of many synthetic fibres. Carothers was away on business the morning his team went running down the halls between the laboratories, pulling their bright, chemical strings behind them.

These were good years for Carothers. European scientists made detours to Wilmington to see his laboratory. He resumed a correspondence with Frances Spencer, an old girlfriend from Tarkio, who was now divorced with a son. “The trouble seems to be my eyes and imagination enormously exceed my capacities,” wrote Carothers, telling Spencer that he had been “extraordinarily lucky” with his fibre and rubber work. “If these two things can be nailed down, that will be enough for one lifetime,” he said. Outside work, he played squash violently, went to parties where he would bring small wooden blocks to explain how molecules worked, and found time to deepen his love of music. Around this period, a young Ukrainian immigrant called Joseph Labovsky started working in Carothers’ laboratory as a bottle washer. Now aged 96, he told me how Carothers, absorbed in his work, often kept him in the laboratory past 1am, when the last trolley car would go down the hill to Wilmington, meaning his young assistant would have to walk home.

But Carothers’ anxieties were never far from the surface. In early 1932, just months after the announcement of a synthetic rubber, he began a letter to Spencer saying, “I thought I told you once about my work. I manage to balance myself in a swivel chair by clinging desperately to the edge of an oaken table. This lasts for 7 1/4 hours a day.” This image of Carothers motionless, but agitated, recurs again and again in his letters. Three months later, he was feeling “feeble, smelly and cockroach-like. Just why, I don’t know. At any rate I go through at least a dozen violent storms of despair every day.” His work drifted. Although the ester pulled out by Julian Hill was DuPont’s most promising synthetic fibre yet, it was water-soluble and melted at a low temperature, making it unsuitable for clothes.

Carothers idled. He studied polymers that formed rings, like many natural scents, and made a passable synthetic musk that DuPont sold to perfumiers. But by the summer of 1932, he was coming under pressure from Bolton, the head of the chemistry department. With the Depression cutting into DuPont’s budgets, he wanted Carothers working towards practical goals. The Depression also meant his father’s commercial college in Des Moines went under, and in the summer of 1933 he invited his parents to live with him in Wilmington. “I not only don’t have any affection for my father but find it exasperating and sometimes sickening merely to be in his presence,” he wrote to Spencer. The arrival of his parents coincided with the end of an affair that Carothers was having with a woman called Sylvia Moore, perhaps the happiest relationship he ever had. He started drinking more.

In early 1934, Bolton persuaded Carothers to look again at fibres. This time, rather than using simple esters, Carothers proposed building polyamides, chains of amides, or proteins. These would be more difficult to construct, but they would be stronger, and with higher melting points. Carothers modified his equipment, identified dozens of potential combinations of starting chemicals and put his assistants to work. By May, they had their first polyamide – the family of fibres now known as nylon – and by July, a polymer Carothers reckoned good enough to become a commercial yarn. But once again, he was not there to celebrate. Because in July 1934, at his second major breakthrough, Carothers had his first major breakdown. “It was rather strange,” Labovsky told me, describing one of Carothers’ attacks. “You would be having a normal conversation, back and forth, and then suddenly, he would become silent and have a blank look on his face, looking at me and not moving, not saying a word, no facial expression. The first time it happened it upset me. I thought he had had a heart attack.”

Jane Wylen was born seven months after her father took his own life

‘I AM PROBABLY UNCONSCIOUSLY BANKRUPT NOW FINANCIALLY, AND CERTAINLY SO MORALLY. JUST TOO LAZY TO MOVE’

CAROTHERS’ LAST THREE YEARS AT DUPONT were a succession of collapses and recoveries. Bolton got the nylon he was looking for – a polyamide made out of cheap raw materials – in February 1935. Dubbed 6-6 because its starting chemicals, hexamethylenediamine and adipic acid, each contained six carbon molecules, it melted at around 260C and was, by weight, six times stronger than steel. But, by this time, Carothers was unwell. Control of the nylon work was given to another chemist, George Graves, while Carothers was sent to a meeting of the Faraday Society at Cambridge University. He then went walking in the Black Forest in Germany to clear his head and returned to Wilmington that autumn. It was then that he started seeing more of a 25-year-old woman called Helen Everett Sweetman, a secretary in the company’s patent office. Some of Carothers’ friends criticised the relationship, saying Sweetman was too young and unworldly for the celebrated scientist. But she had a chemistry degree; others thought that marriage and a family would help bring order to his life. Carothers and Sweetman were married in February 1936.

It didn’t work. That summer, Carothers had his worst attack yet, and was sectioned for nearly two months at the Philadelphia Institute. In a funny, detached letter to a friend, his handwriting loopy and an inch high, Carothers described his treatment as “conversation, rambling, inconsequential, pointless and sometimes so repetitious and puerile as to be the source of laughter, amazement or anger”. He wondered how much it was all costing. “I am probably unconsciously bankrupt now financially and certainly so morally. Just too lazy to move.” He went walking again, this time in the Alps, and returned to DuPont a final time. During his final six months there, he was a vague presence. He would give signs of hope – saying that he was going to explore the tobacco mosaic virus, a protein that later yielded many of the first discoveries in molecular biology – but would more often despair that he was never going to have another idea. He flitted from the apartment he shared with Helen to a spare room in his old house and back to the hospital.

IN JANUARY 1937, CAROTHERS WAS DEEPLY shaken by the death of his sister, Isobel, a radio performer in Chicago. Three months later, and three days before his suicide, Helen told him that she was pregnant with their first child. On the night of April 28 1937, Carothers drove into Philadelphia. He was found dead around noon the next day in a room at the Philadelphia Hotel. He had swallowed his cyanide pill with the juice of a lemon.

Nearly everyone in Wilmington learnt about Carothers’ death from the front page of the newspapers. Labovsky found out on the trolley car, reading The Philadelphia Record. “I was stunned, I was like somebody gave me a shot with a needle of some kind of dope,” he said. Helen was one of the few who did not find out about his death until she arrived at work: DuPont had sent an employee to take the newspaper off her doormat.

I met Jane Wylen (her married name) in Florida, on a warm afternoon of rain. She is 71 now, and lives in New Smyrna Beach, a city of apartment blocks and mangrove swamps a few miles north of Cape Canaveral. When shuttles land, she told me, it kind of shakes the place. Wylen has her father’s straight mouth and his faint cleft in her chin. She moved to Florida from upstate New York 10 years ago and these days divides her time between walking, cycling and learning Spanish online. At the time we met, she was also a volunteer copy-editor for The Huffington Post, a US political blog, and was trying to get the vote out for Barack Obama. Wylen preferred to discuss these activities, or the wildlife of New Smyrna, rather than her father. “I feel just far away,” she said. “I don’t feel any identification. Even at the last ceremony I went to, it’s as if it has nothing to do with me.”

Soon after Jane’s birth, Helen gave up her job at DuPont and severed most contact with Carothers’ friends and the company. She stayed in Wilmington but never told her daughter what her father had done, or what he was like. In fact, she barely spoke of him at all. Wylen was 13 when she learnt that her father had killed himself. Her source? A line of dialogue in a novel. She can’t remember its name, or the author, only that it had a green cover, she had read it downstairs in the den, and that it was set on a rubber plantation. “One of the characters asks another one: ‘Do you know why Wallace Carothers killed himself?’ And she says, ‘No.’” Wylen paused in her recollection. “So.”

Finally, when she was 16, her best friend told her that her father had committed suicide because he was terrified of having children, and was convinced that his illness would be passed on to them. “We were sitting way out in the country, we were sitting on some rocks, by a creek or a little river,” said Wylen. “She said the rumour was that he had killed himself because my mother got pregnant… I don’t… It was just a rumour, I guess.”

Other intrusions were more welcome. Wylen had a friend who was training to be a polymer chemist, and when she told him who her father was, he asked to touch Carothers’ notebooks, just to hold them. “He was, like, in awe,” she said. But as she grew up, married, and moved with her husband to Schenectady, in upstate New York, Wylen moved Carothers to the back of her mind. “Oh, for many years I was really mad at him,” she said. “I was really mad at him for depriving me of a father.” She did not tell people who her father had been, or what he did, even people she knew well. She didn’t even buy nylon stockings. They made her feet sweat.

Instead, Carothers became a kind of figment in her mind. Not a thing, so much, or a person. Rather, he would occur to Wylen in the ways that she found herself thinking, or behaving. Her shyness, for instance, she put down to him; her ability to concentrate deeply. She told me about a time when jackhammers in the street were shaking her office building. “I didn’t hear it when I was working. That wasn’t true of other people. It drove them crazy. But I didn’t hear it,” said Wylen. “I was kind of the only one.”

But most of all, she got to know him through depression. Just as Carothers would seize up while talking to his lab assistant, his daughter would find herself suddenly crippled at work. “When I was depressed I was afraid to talk to the secretary,” she said. “And when I wasn’t depressed I would tell her stories. And I thought: ‘What am I thinking? They must think I’m crazy, that I’m two different people.’” Like her father, Wylen found some relief in walking and climbing mountains. In summer 1995, for instance, she climbed 18 mountains in the Adirondack national park, where she lived. “I just wanted to do it so badly,” she said.

But it was in 2004, when a traumatic event triggered a three-year period of deep depression, that the figure of her father loomed closest. Like him, Wylen became motionless. “I would spend all morning in bed and all afternoon sitting on the right side of the sofa looking out at the river,” she said. “Always in the same place, the right side of the sofa.”

But Wylen survived. She says she is medicated, and stable now. “I think that did kind of make me understand,” she said on her balcony. “You know, after that, I stopped being mad at him.” It was the following morning by this point, near the end of my visit. Wylen told me that she was starting to tell people about Carothers now. She had told her cleaning lady, and been surprised by her reaction. “She was so excited,” Wylen said, sounding genuinely pleased. “So I’ve kind of been telling myself it’s not something that I have to be ashamed about.” But she still dropped the subject as soon as she could. “Look, here’s a dolphin going through,” she said, pointing to the water, eager to be distracted.

“You’ll have to wait until he’s going to come up again.” FT

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SOMETHING TO GROUSE ABOUT ON THE 12TH

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The Glorious 12th, a date etched in leadshot and liver pâté. While fortunes shrivelled and moorland crumbled, tradition marched on — bang by bang, leaving behind feathers, empty wallets and the occasional toast point garnished with regret

CRISES MAY COME AND STERLING HOBBLE downwards, but the Glorious Twelfth – traditional start to the grouse-shooting season – has wheeled round again, as fixed and stable as the calendar.

This morning the beaters, the flankers and the dogs will be out; the silly grouse will start hurtling around at 70mph, and by this evening the slowest and the unluckiest will be on the table at the Savoy, served on toast and surmounted by their own liver pâté.

But out on the moors, the shooting prospects range from moderate to bad – the result of poor weather and disease – while in the market for sporting property, prices have caught a very bad cold.

The collapse in agricultural and sporting land values started with the Yom Kippur war, but has become much worse since. At the height of the great land boom in mid-1973, grouse moors in Scotland were fetching the equivalent of at least £1,000 per brace (sporting values are expressed in terms of the bag, not the acreage) and freehold salmon fishing rights at least £1,000 per salmon.

Deer forests – available at around £150 per stag 18 to 20 years ago – were fetching £10,000 and even £25,000 per stag. All that has changed. Mr Sam Goodenough, an expert at Knight Frank and Rutley, reckons that values in Scotland have declined to the point where grouse moors are now commanding only £300 to £500 per brace, salmon fishing rights about £500 per salmon, and deer forests under £5,000 – perhaps £3,000 – per stag.

“Grouse moors are difficult,” says Mr Goodenough. “Very few of any quality have come on to the market, so there is little firm evidence regarding price. But there is, you might say, a shortage of buyers. The Stock Market, high personal income tax, CTT, fears of a wealth tax… almost nobody’s buying.”

Mr Brian Keatley, a partner at Humbert, Flint, Rawlence and Squarey, says of the grouse: “ If you want a day’s shooting you can have it – at the drop of a hat.”

Shooting on the Yorkshire moors will cost around £1,000 a day for a party of nine guns and a bag of 70-120 brace. For that you get the services of the keeper and the beaters. You also get drinks but supply your own lunch. Two years ago, a day’s shooting like that would have cost £2,000.

According to Mr Keatley: “Conditions at the moment aren’t very good. The hot weather is bad for the grouse. They’re sitting very tight and the dogs will walk over them. Better wait until September.”

One of many indications that the boom days are gone was the closure, earlier this year, of the Seafield Sporting Club venture based at Cullen in Banffshire.

The Seafield family estates stretch over much of Banffshire, Inverness-shire and Morayshire, and the Sporting Club venture offered guests facilities for salmon and sea trout, grouse, pheasant and partridge, capercaillie, roe deer and red deer, wood pigeon and duck.

The shooting is still being let. Mr Hugh Blakeney, Lord Seafield’s factor at the Grantown-on-Spey end of the estates (the four Seafield grouse moors yield an average of 4,400 brace annually), says charges range from £20 to £150 per gun per day.

More than half the clients are foreign – American, Belgian, French, Spanish and Italian. They can fly in by private jet.

And the shooting? The prospects are not good. On many Scottish estates the heather beetle has been at work, while snows in June, the drought of the past six weeks and disease among the birds have all taken a toll.

Among establishments in London that will be serving grouse tonight are the Savoy, the Dorchester and the Connaught Hotel, each with its own notions of how best to serve the dish. “The price,” said the Connaught enigmatically, “has still to be arranged.”

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THREE FALLS IN THE ALPS

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Let us turn the page to a tale of altitude and attitude, of birthdays celebrated above the clouds and lives that teeter on ice. A slip, a fall and love untethered

I wake up in a hut in the Swiss Alps, excited. It is April 2011 and my partner Erhard and I are about to complete a 10-day trek to celebrate his birthday. He is turning 52 today.

The ascent is not particularly challenging, but it is long. We set out before sunrise to ensure we reach the Grünhorn's 4,000m summit with time to enjoy views of the Aletsch glacier, the largest in the Alps. As we adjust our head torches in the dark outside the hut, I notice, for the first time, the skull and crossbones stitched on to Erhard's woollen hat. He chuckles, joking that, when the time comes for the final journey, everyone should be prepared.

We cover the first part of the climb on backcountry skis, which have skins glued to the bottom to create a strong grip on the soft snow. Once the slope gets steeper and icier and the wind picks up, we swap the skis for crampons, tie ourselves together at the waist with rope and start to use our ice picks. We walk slowly along the ridge that leads to the summit, and I try to follow Erhard's footsteps more closely. As always when we climb, Erhard is leading.

Then our rope is jumping around wildly, and the blue walls of my childhood bedroom surround me. I can see huge black rocks below. "Darling, it's over," I say. "I hope it won't hurt too much." The words are clear, but there is no sound.

When I open my eyes, I'm lying down. Everything is white. I don't feel scared, just incredibly tired. I know that falling asleep might lead to fatal hypothermia, but I close my eyes. It is peaceful and very quiet. I no longer feel my body, because I'm no longer a physical person, just a floating spirit bathed in sweet, white light.

We have fallen more than 200m, after I slipped on the ice, hurling my partner into the void with me. Did he do something at the last minute to ensure he would hit the jagged cliff wall and that I would, instead, bounce off a snow patch? Did he even have time to think before our tether yanked him off his feet? All I know for sure is that this accident begins a miraculous new chapter of my life.

One of these miracles is the mountain guide who has been following our footsteps to the summit. He makes an emergency call as soon as he realises the tracks have abruptly disappeared close to the cliff's edge. I spend at least five hours unconscious in the deep snow amassed by the wind at the bottom of the cliff before a rescue helicopter flies me to a hospital in the city of Sion, 40 miles away.

I come close to freezing to death, but the doctors are amazed by how little damage my body suffers from the fall. No vital organ has been injured. My legs are unbroken, my skull intact. The diagnosis is a broken wrist, a broken vertebra and several broken ribs. Erhard is dead. The helicopter also transported the body of the man I loved. He was found lying in the snow next to me, still tied to my waist. I never realised that he had been right there, within touching distance.

It is not the last time I will fall.

ERHARD LORETAN WAS ONE OF THE WORLD'S most acclaimed climbers, the third man to summit all of the planet's 14 peaks more than 8,000m in altitude, after the Italian Reinhold Messner and Jerzy Kukuczka, a Pole. Erhard never used bottled oxygen and was admired among fellow mountaineers for pioneering the "night-naked" style, carrying as little equipment as possible to climb faster, including through the night hours. In 1986, Erhard and another Swiss climber reached the top of Everest and back in only 43 hours, without rope and taking just half a litre of water each and a few chocolate bars, before sliding back down on their bottoms to base camp. Messner called their Everest climb a work of genius. In its obituary, The Daily Telegraph quoted Peter Hillary, the son of Everest's first conqueror, comparing Erhard's approach to mountaineering to somebody climbing the outside of a skyscraper by "following grooves in the concrete and glass".

As much as he loved pushing the boundaries, Erhard struggled with the attention his exploits generated, particularly in his native, mountaineering-obsessed Switzerland. Once he got too old to set new records, he returned to regular mountain guiding and kept a low profile. In private, he would sometimes express disdain for unprepared mountain tourists, who he viewed as dangerous to their guides and other climbers, as well as harmful to the environment.

I was very much one of these tourists, compensating for my lack of technique with endurance and determination. Since my teenage years, I've always tried to see how quickly I could go from zero to advanced, whether practising a new sport, such as climbing, or learning a complicated language, such as Russian or Arabic. And when I find a guide or a teacher inspiring, then I really develop the belief that I will succeed.

I begin mountaineering in earnest in 2008 and immediately catch the bug. Having long loved horse riding, I swap afternoons galloping bareback across the countryside outside Geneva, where I work as a judge, for weekends climbing the Alps. Each climbing season, I manage longer and more complicated ascents with the help and encouragement of a handful of professionals.

The first time I climb with Erhard, he offers none of the usual words of support. Instead, we walk for nine hours in near-total silence. Erhard never stops or turns around to check on me. Once I understand the marching order, I decide to follow him and keep my mouth shut, however unpleasant it feels not to even get a toilet break. I think I win his admiration, even if he never admits it. Within a few months, the challenge of keeping up with him turns into love. I now spend my weekends in his mountain chalet in Gruyère, his home region, or in the camper van Erhard uses to crisscross the Alps.

We are in love, but there is a distance. Erhard often keeps to himself and rarely speaks about his past. I respect his privacy, well aware of the tragedy that occurred almost a decade earlier. One evening, Erhard was alone with his and his then-partner's seven-month-old son, Ewan. Upset by the infant's crying, Erhard shook him violently and put him back in his cot to settle down. Ewan died the next day, on Christmas Eve. In 2003, Erhard received a suspended prison sentence of four months for negligent manslaughter. His trial shocked Swiss society, while also raising public awareness of shaken baby syndrome, the type of brain injury that can be fatal in babies and toddlers.

Erhard tells me that the sentencing, as well as the media and public opinion, felt like nothing compared to the judgment of his own conscience and the horror of knowing that he is a father who killed his son. His words strike a deep chord within me, particularly since I am a judge.

Following Erhard's death in 2011, I find it ironic that I'm also forced to live my personal drama in public. After initially refusing to speak to journalists from my hospital bed, I decide to write a column for a Swiss newspaper to pay homage to Erhard but also to question the concepts of risk, guilt and how tragic events are interpreted by the law. My fall was immediately ruled an accident by the Swiss judiciary, but what would have happened if I had died and Erhard had survived? Could he have been found guilty of negligent manslaughter once more? In my writing, I also wonder if I somehow became a judge in order to question the purpose and the meaning of justice itself. I come to call this belief "reverse causality", the idea that the present can explain the past, rather than the other way round.

Despite my new doubts about my profession, I feel that I need to return to work as soon as possible. Three weeks after my accident, I get back to my judge's chair. My career is not in jeopardy, but my unexpectedly prompt reappearance isn't welcomed by all, and I soon find out that some of my colleagues are arguing that I'm not in the right state of mind to administer justice. I confront the president of the Geneva courtrooms, who acknowledges that he also finds it hard to understand why I'm back at work, when some other judges take days of sick leave just to nurse a cold. I tell him to trust me, that I can go home if I don't feel up to the job. But my private health insurance also insists that a psychiatrist must determine whether I'm fit to work. My sessions with the psychiatrist prove uneasy, especially after I refuse to take the antidepressants he immediately wants to prescribe. We eventually reach a compromise whereby I agree to work part-time.

One good thing comes of my meetings with the psychiatrist: our negotiations help me realise that the part of my work that I really appreciate is mediation, getting people to agree to disagree, so that they can settle out of court without wasting more money on lawyers and more time on appeals. Increasingly, I see justice as an elaborate game, whose rules are set and sometimes altered by people who do not necessarily have the best interest of the feuding parties in mind.

Out of court, I try to build a quieter life in which moments of introspection are no longer limited to the hours spent riding a horse or climbing a mountain. I live in Geneva but exist outside city life. I get upset by messages of compassion and the attention of colleagues and friends, however well intentioned. One day, I erase from my address book the names of dozens of lawyers and friends with whom I had enjoyed spending time. Even a visit to the stables of Lancelot, the beautiful black stallion I used to ride, brings little joy.

I start to watch the world around me much more closely. Some afternoons, I sit on a bench inside Geneva's train station, observing. I try to imagine why so many people would want to travel, what drives them to pace back and forth on the platform, how the panic on their faces suggests their lives depend upon catching a train. We all think that we are going places, that we are setting the pace and choosing our direction, and yet most of us seem to forget that key events in our lives are unknown to us, particularly the moment of our death. After discovering the writings of Carl Jung, the Swiss psychologist, I also come to embrace his concept of the "shadow self" – the hidden inner personality that makes us project on to others our own desires or shortcomings.

IN THE SUMMER OF 2011, I TAKE A THREE-week break, filling my suitcase with a strict minimum of clothing. I need room to pack the diaries I kept as a teenager as well as books that my next-door neighbour has chosen for me. I plough through Osho and Eckhart Tollé, but my favourite is *Alice in Wonderland*, which I didn't like as a child but now find impossible to put down. What is reality and what is a dream? Isn't falling asleep a little like death, since nothing guarantees we will awake? Among other readings, Alice helps me make some sense of my brief experience of imminent death and the afterlife.

After my vacation, I resume my double life in Geneva. I'm a judge for a few hours each day, trying to convince people to settle outside my courtroom, and a hermit the rest of the time, rejecting invitations and phone calls from friends, until eventually I stop getting them.

In the summer of 2012, I have to have more surgery on my wrist, which was badly operated on after my fall. I welcome this unexpected opportunity to scrutinise a specific part of my body, so I ask to watch the surgery, which normally occurs behind a screen. I watch, fascinated from the outside by what is happening inside, as the doctor cuts through the tissues. Afterwards, I decide I need to better understand the link between mind and body. I spend the next two years taking anatomy courses at a school where I am the only participant not studying to actually practise alternative medicine. Most of my courtroom work involves real-estate disputes, so I start enjoying the idea that I'm just a tenant inside my body, trying to keep up the maintenance but aware that my lease might expire any minute.

My introspection leads me to a world of shamans who offer the keys to unlock the spirit. Soon enough, I start to substitute the extreme sensations that I had once felt mountaineering with Erhard for those that can be had while playing the drums to reach a trance, taking Amazonian ayahuasca, Mexican peyote, injecting psychedelic toad's venom into my bloodstream or using different synthetic drugs. At one stage, I start a relationship with the assistant to a so-called shaman whose spiritual retreat I attend. I see in him a healer rather than just a lover, but I find instead a lost soul, immersed in drugs. I manage to leave him after several months, once I finally come to terms with the extent to which he was simply feeding my desire to play the victim.

Without fully realising it, I spend almost four years navigating a universe of eclectic New Age practices, alongside people with whom I mostly don't want to talk. With hindsight, I come to believe power, money and spiritualism form a dangerous concoction. Substances can open the mind, but they need to go hand-in-hand with the intense and difficult work of introspection.

IN THE SUMMER OF 2017, I FALL IN LOVE with Jean-François, a friend of Erhard's since they were teenagers. They share the same enthusiasm for nature and solitude, as well as the passion for climbing, which Jean-François practises daily in a converted barn that serves both as his workshop and climbing wall. A carpenter by training, Jean-François built his own house in the valley next to the one where Erhard once lived. He reignites my fascination with the mountains, even if I have lost the desire to climb the tallest ones. (My logbook was permanently closed after reaching 47 of the 48 Swiss peaks of more than 4,000m.)

But the winter after we get together, I decide to join Jean-François back-country skiing. Jean-François is more talkative than Erhard, and his words help dissipate any apprehension that I might have had when starting out at the bottom of the slope. We talk about everything, except Erhard.

Jean-François tells me that he is interested in my present, not my past life.

In January 2018, we climb a nearby mountain on our skis. It is a beautiful, clear day but, halfway up, I feel a sudden urge to return to the chalet. A few minutes later, I plunge into a ditch. I immediately feel that I'm seriously injured, as I have flipped back on to one of my own skis. Jean-François tells me that I probably have broken my sternum with my own chin, but that I might also have more serious damage. He rushes off to get a phone signal and call for help, while I follow his instructions to lie still. I feel scared as I try to fight off the cold. A helicopter eventually airlifts me, this time to a hospital in the city of Lausanne.

The doctors confirm my sternum is broken, as well as several ribs. More worryingly, I have broken three vertebrae, including the top one, the atlas (just as Atlas supported the globe, it supports the entire head). I am injected with morphine, which gives me sensations similar to those I experienced during shamanic ceremonies. I have a vision of my back, the skin entirely removed, like a carcass waiting to be sliced by the butcher. The surgeons want to operate on my spinal cord immediately, which they say is necessary to ensure I don't spend the rest of my life in a wheelchair. But the surgery is risky. As a result of my anatomy classes, I've also become more sceptical of the protocols that hospital doctors follow, especially when they are too rushed.

With the support of Jean-François and a doctor who helped me recover from my previous accident, I decide to go with the alternative: a rigid corset that compresses me from neck to waist. I will have to wear it for many months, if not longer, with no guarantee the vertebrae will heal properly.

After two weeks in hospital, I'm allowed to return to Jean-François's chalet, where he becomes my permanent nurse, taking time off only to continue his carpentry work in the adjacent barn. I'm lying on a bed specially adjusted by Jean-François, who also uses his DIY skills to convert part of the ground floor into a space in which he can bathe me. He takes care of me without any sign of frustration. He tells me about the Hawaiian concept of Ho'oponopono, that our souls jointly created this accident so that we could grow enough to surmount it. Everything that happens on Earth, that people like to define as good or evil, is in fact following the path dictated by our souls, he tells me.

Once more, I'm forced to take sick leave and told that I won't be able to work for at least eight months. But I'm living with a man who is willing to take on any task, including that of a physical therapist. From the onset, he promises me that my body will re-emerge stronger than before the accident. We also adopt two kittens, Snow and Luna.

My corset and strong headaches make it too uncomfortable for me to read, so I listen to audiobooks, most of which have to do with the mind and the body. I try to learn more from Jung, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Alan Watts, Frédéric Lenoir and Joe Dispenza, among others. I completely stop listening to the news and lose interest in any of the stories that make the headlines.

In the summer of 2018, I return to work part-time, once again much quicker than anticipated. I'm not fully healed, but I've learnt to treat my corset as if it were armour and ignore some of the tensions and unpleasant comments that welcome me back in to the courtroom. I'm almost enjoying having to keep my head completely still; I only focus on the person I am facing and who is talking to me, ignoring all the other things that could normally distract me.

Eventually, I recover and no longer have to wear the corset. I keep it at home and occasionally put it on to remind myself how miraculous it is that my body can stand straight. But my year doesn't end peacefully. We must bury one of our cats, Luna, killed by a car on the road that crosses our village. "She decided to leave us," Jean-François tells me. "She's leading the way," I reply.

I START 2019 BY USING MY INDEPENDENCE as a judge to set up a new work schedule that allows me to only spend three days a week in Geneva. While in the city, I also bunch together my court hearings in order to have time to visit my dad, whose health is declining. I spend the rest of the week with Jean-François in his chalet, where I write my court rulings with a view of the small mountain outside.

For decades, Jean-François has begun his days by climbing this mountain – on back-country skis in winter, jogging in summer – and paragliding back down in time for breakfast. This morning routine has kept him not only incredibly fit but also very close to the nature that he loves as much as he hates city life.

A SEARCH PARTY FINDS JEAN-FRANÇOIS'S BODY BURIED UNDER A SMALL AVALANCHE. WHEN THE HELICOPTER LANDS, I RUSH TO EMBRACE HIM AND KISS HIS COLD FACE

One morning in February, when I'm working in Geneva, I try to call Jean-François to wish him a wonderful day. He doesn't pick up the phone. Anxious, I send him a text message, awkwardly joking that I hope he has enjoyed "flying to the song of the eagles".

At lunchtime, I visit my dad in the hospital where he has undergone a foot amputation. He seems to be losing his desire to fight his illness and, by the time I reach the car park, I am in distress, worried about my partner and exasperated by my father. In the early afternoon, I get a call from Jean-François's son, who lives nearby. He tells me there is no sign of his father and that he's calling emergency services. I drive two hours from Geneva back to the mountains, struggling to keep my eyes on the road. My reason wants to argue all will be fine, but my heart knows this is not the case. Overnight, a search party finds his body buried under a small avalanche. Jean-François died on the mountain that he knew like the back of his hand.

When the rescue helicopter lands, I rush to embrace Jean-François and kiss his cold face, until the emergency team forces me to let go. It's the second time I'm kissing my dead partner. Eight years earlier, I had insisted that I should be taken, by ambulance, from my hospital bed to the cemetery to attend Erhard's funeral.

Another new chapter. Soon enough, my fears about my dad are confirmed, and I learn that he is having another amputation. Despite repeated promises from the doctors that he will soon return home, he dies in the hospital six months later.

A month after burying Jean-François, I decide that I must quit my job as a judge. In the upper echelons of the Swiss legal system, it is almost unheard of for a 46-year-old judge to retire under normal circumstances. I was considered young when I was appointed 11 years ago; now I want to become Geneva's youngest retired judge.

My brother tries to convince me that I should not abandon one of the most secure and prestigious jobs in Switzerland, that I should instead ask for an unpaid leave of absence. But I want to turn the page fully, with zero temptation to ever return to a profession in which the letter of the law seems to me to have become more important than the spirit and where status is placed above feeling. I find it ridiculous to be greeted by people with phrases like "Your Honour".

MY LAST DAY AS A JUDGE IS JULY 30 2019, which is also my birthday, and leaving feels like the perfect gift. I look back on a job that was never a vocation, rather something I took up as a personal challenge. Difficult and rewarding, but low risk. Luckily, I have enough savings to allow me to lead a frugal life. I could also tap into some of my pension money before reaching the official retirement age, should I ever actually reach it.

I start this new chapter believing that I am more solid spiritually than I was in 2011, when Erhard died. I now feel as light as he was when he climbed Everest, with only his water bottle and chocolate. I have no professional duties, no social obligations, and I can devote all my time to trying to understand myself better.

After reading the Yoga Sutras of Patañjali, I add more yoga to my early morning routine, which is a blend of meditation, long bouts of deep breathing and some other physical movement. I also return to an earlier interest in massage and study a Hawaiian technique, Lomi Lomi, that I start to practise on my very few visitors, mostly my mother and brother. I now rent a chalet, at an altitude of 1,000m, just below a ski resort in the Valais region of Switzerland. The chalet is on the outskirts of a village, and its main assets are its windows and terrace, from where I enjoy what I consider to be the best TV show in the world. I try to rise with the sun and watch it set every day, as it colours the snowy Alpine peaks pink, deep orange and, finally, dark blue.

Snow, my cat, is also my last link with Jean-François, since we raised him together. But in May this year, on Ascension Day, Snow doesn't return from one of his hunting trips in the surrounding fields. I spend hours walking up and down the road that runs past our home, until I find his corpse in a ditch. I surmise he must have managed to crawl there after being hit by a car. My sorrow is immense, but soon eclipsed by the gratitude that I feel for having shared an intense part of my life with Snow, whose presence became as important for me as that of any human being. Every being comes, every being goes. I now always try to think of Snow's departure as the completion of his main mission on Earth, which was to help me overcome the loss of Jean-François. As Jung put it, "Life is a luminous pause between two mysteries that are yet one." FT

As told to Xenia's brother, Raphael Minder, who is the FT's central Europe correspondent

FABRICE COFFRINI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

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CLEMENT CRISP: A CAREER IN QUOTES

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ARCHIVIST'S NOTE

For more than 60 years, Clement Crisp wielded his pen like a stiletto: precise, elegant, occasionally lethal. Dance delighted him, dancers dazzled him, but mediocrity? That was dispatched without mercy. Critics may retire, but their words never die

Clement Crisp in 1983 with the Russian ballerina Natalia Makarova

Every week for more than 60 years Clement Crisp, now 89, wrote about dance, in all its forms, for the arts pages of the Financial Times, only retiring well into his eighties for reasons of health. His life-long passion for dance began when he first went to the ballet as a teenager during the second world war, and his career has encompassed the span of dance in Britain and beyond almost ever since.

His tall, always elegantly dressed figure was a staple in opera houses and ballet venues across the world, and the many books he co-authored with Mary Clarke over the years remain classic texts. From the classics to the far reaches of the experimental, from the creation of the Royal Ballet in 1956 to the hip-hop delights of recent years, he responded to dance and dancers from the Bolshoi to Beijing with an expert eye and a writing style that was always original, always sharp, always passionate in quest of the truth as he found it.

Clement's unforgiving critical writing made him adored and revered by many, feared by some. His merciless style could inflict painful wounds on its targets. Clement considers this inevitable if a critic is honest: when faced with what he saw as incompetent staging or intellectual pretension, or a host of other failings, he believed that "comment must raise weals". And raise weals it did, even when – perhaps especially when – his quips were hilariously entertaining for general readers.

Of music, he described aural effects that suggested "someone is taking to pig-sticking in quite the wrong way"; a score "like the mating-call of an air-conditioner"; another like "a Chieftain tank having a tango lesson". Costumes too came in for a roasting: he expressed tender sympathy for a dancer who had been adorned with "a headdress like a suicidal meringue"; in a *Giselle* of 2000, "someone has been doling out moustaches to the lads. Unwise."

Whole productions were sometimes ruthlessly dismissed: he describes a *Scheherazade* in 2000 as having "all the erotic charge of a Bath bun"; in 1995 a double bill of *Tales of Beatrix Potter* and *Peter and the Wolf* was "a combination to delight Good King Herod"; at Nureyev's farewell in 1991, dancers "wore the uneasy expressions of people who sense that the oysters weren't quite as fresh as they might have been". One especially imaginative production in 1999 provoked a memorable sign-off: "The last image of the evening is of the women slowly (because upside down) going up the wall. We know how they felt."

Even some of the great classics took the rough side of Clement's tongue: after a lifetime of *Swan Lakes*, he described that ballet to me once as "those two four-letter words" and in print as "the stalest of theatrical pleasures". In 2009, he despairingly attended "another *Swan Lake* nearer the crematorium".

Yet Clement was wonderfully generous in praise. And not only of his favourite classical ballet dancers – he relished the fire and energy of street dance and hip-hop, for instance, and described dancer and choreographer Akram Khan, working in the Indian kathak tradition allied to a contemporary vision, as "an artist of rare gifts, transcendent, wonderful".

He understood the power of a critic's praise as much as the force of their disapprobation. He spotted young talent early, usually with unerring accuracy, and nurtured it carefully, following dancers' and choreographers' careers over the years, keeping a careful and almost protective eye on their progress. He preferred, it's fair to say, the dancers to the dance, and was always eager to heap credit where he felt it due.

All these riches – the wisdom, the insights, the sheer joy of brilliant writing – can be savoured in a new book that collects the cream of Clement's reviews over his long career, beautifully put together with scores of photographs. It has been created and published by the newly formed International Dance Writing Foundation, whose aim is to keep the art of dance criticism alive and flourishing. The book is a fitting tribute to a great critic and a deep pleasure for all those who love the dance.

'COMMENT MUST RAISE WEALS'

"My anger is reserved for incompetent staging, for the traducing of the past and for choreographers whose works are laden with intellectual pretensions, with flagday generalities, and who deform existing works through insensitivities worthy of Attila the Hun. Here, comment must raise weals."

'WE BELIEVE AND SUFFER WITH BARYSHNIKOV'

Romeo and Juliet, Royal Ballet, Royal Opera House, London (October 24 1975)

"At every moment we believe and suffer with [Mikhail Baryshnikov]. And, on purely technical terms, we can but salute a phenomenally accomplished dancer. We knew something of this

DINA MAKAROFF; THE ASAHI SHIMBUN/GETTY IMAGES

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ARCHIVIST'S NOTE
Tonight's performance features one actor, one plane and one blazing critique of corruption — delivered straight through the second floor. A kamikaze gesture, some say. Others might call it a review

A JAPANESE ACTOR TOOK ON THE ROLE of a Kamikaze-style suicide pilot today and crashed his aircraft into the home of the key figure in the Lockheed bribes scandal, businessman Yoshio Kodama.

Mr Kodama, who is bedridden, and his family and bodyguards escaped unhurt after the single-engine Piper aircraft smashed into the second floor of his two-storey luxury house and exploded.

Firemen doused the flames and recovered the charred body of the little-known actor, Mitsuyasu Maeno. Police said his last words over the aircraft radio were "Tenno-Heiko banzai" – long live the Emperor, the traditional cry of wartime kamikaze pilots.

Mr Kodama has remained in his bedroom behind bulletproof windows since the pay-off scandal broke in early February and he was identified as a "secret consultant" for the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation, helping it to sell its aircraft in Japan in return for several million dollars.

Smoke rises from the residence of Yoshio Kodama

Mr Kodama has been the target of abuse from both left and right since the Lockheed affair surfaced in a US Senate sub-committee in early February. He is now under criminal indictment by the public prosecutor's office on charges of massive tax evasion totalling nearly $3m as a result of the alleged payments from Lockheed.

WASHINGTON: US and Japanese officials were due to sign an agreement last night providing the Japanese conditional access to information about Lockheed Aircraft Corp. payoffs in Japan. The Senate foreign relations committee yesterday postponed until next week any decision on what material to provide the Justice Department for its investigation of Lockheed payoffs for its foreign sales. Subcommittee chairman, Sen. Frank Church, a Democratic Presidential nomination candidate, said he sought the postponement so he could be present for the discussions. (Agencies).

ROME: Police arrested a former Italian air force chief and a Rome lawyer last night on the orders of a magistrate investigating the Lockheed scandal, justice sources said.

The former air force chief, General Dullio Fanali, was chief of staff at the time the Italian government bought 14 C-130 Hercules transport aircraft from Lockheed. The lawyer, Sig. Antonio d'Olivio Lefebvre, was detained in a separate arrest at about the same time.

Later, a Rome prosecutor issued warrants for the arrest of Max Melka and Luigi Olivi, two missing Liechtenstein-based businessmen, who allegedly served as go-betweens for $1.8m bribe payments to Italian officials from the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation.

The investigating magistrate, meanwhile, said he was changing all charges made so far from corruption to extortion.

OUR COLOMBO CORRESPONDENT WRITES: The Minister of Shipping, Aviation and Tourism said today that he has ordered Air Ceylon authorities to cease all negotiations with Lockheed. The airline is not expanding its international service and has already finished preliminary discussions with Lockheed for lease of a TriStar aircraft.

already, albeit we were not perhaps prepared for the maturity of style… He takes off on flights that suggest a new breed of male classical dancer."

'THE FUTURE OF CLASSIC BALLET LIES WITH CHINESE DANCERS'

The Red Detachment of Women/The Yellow River Concerto, Beijing Dance Academy, Peacock Theatre, London (October 31 1998)
"I have taken a bet with myself that a vital part of the future of classic ballet lies with Chinese dancers and teachers. There is not just a magnificent physical aptitude; there also seems a sincerity and dedication (and without loss of individuality) which promises marvels."

'ARISTOCRACY MAY BE A NAUGHTY WORD'

Rhapsody, Royal Ballet, Royal Opera House, London (March 29 2011)
"About [Sergei Polunin's] princely manner, his clear and boldly scaled classic style, his unassailably beautiful dancing, there can be no doubts… Aristocracy may be a naughty word in our telly-prole age but Polunin dances with an elegant clarity that proclaims the virtues of classic dance as a noble activity for humanity."

'FONTEYN DANCES AURORA BY DIVINE RIGHT'

The Sleeping Beauty, Royal Ballet, Royal Opera House, London (March 17 1972)
"Great art in the theatre must ultimately defy description: in ballet we can talk of line, musicality, of classic grace, harmony and authority; in speaking of Fonteyn, the essence of her greatness will escape us… My programme for the evening bears hastily scribbled remarks about her artistry… but ultimately I must record that Fonteyn dances Aurora by divine right."

'KHAN HAS THAT RAREST OF DANCE GIFTS'

Eleven/Ronin/Anandam, Akram Khan Company, Purcell Room, London (April 16 2003)
"[Akram] Khan's brilliance in this style is beyond question. Lightning speed. Gesture that pours from him with the richest variety of accent and impulse… Khan has that rarest of dance gifts, the ability to alter speed and time itself. He can do the same thing with gesture: in variety of speed and impulse, in contrasting savours of dynamic, he enraptures the eye."

'A MALE DANCER WITHOUT PRECEDENT'

Different Drummer, Royal Ballet, Royal Opera House, London (February 8 2008)
"Edward Watson is a male dancer without precedent in the history of the Royal Ballet. In my long experience of the company, we have never before been shown a danseur of such penetrating and subtle power, one who can so grandly capture and convey the inner life of a role, its choreographic and dramatic reason."

'IT TAKES SKILL TO MAKE SEX BORING'

La Ronde, Royal Ballet, Royal Opera House, London (May 1 1995)
"It takes skill to make sex boring, but [Glen] Tetley pulls it off, aided by the turgid nonsense of Korngold's Sinfonietta, a score actually written by Richard Strauss's hairdresser… My sympathies are with the marvellous Darcey Bussell, cast as a prostitute whose unenviable task is to end the ballet by wriggling on the ground with all the amorous ecstasy of a grass snake on heat."

'THINK OF THE CENTURY'S MUSIC WITHOUT STRAVINSKY'

George Balanchine: An Appreciation (September 27 2003)
"Balanchine, in his every work, proclaimed the seeming infinite possibilities of classic ballet: to delight the eye, ennoble the performer, illuminate the music and assert the rule of clarity over murk… Without him dance in the last century would have been so vastly poorer that it does not bear contemplating. Think of the century's music without Stravinsky… its painting without Picasso."

'DANCING PURE AND SIMPLE'

Second Hand/Signals/Borst Park/Rainforest, Merce Cunningham, Sadler's Wells, London (February 10 1972)
"Still the most adventurous and uncompromising of creators, [Merce] Cunningham shows us dancing pure and simple: pure, because he purposely alienates any of those 19th-century trappings of decoration and music; simple, because his dances don't say anything, they just are."

'IT IS DIFFICULT TO RECONCILE TODAY'S ROYAL BALLET WITH ITS PAST'

In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated/Por vos Muero/Carmen, Royal Ballet, Royal Opera House, London (April 12 2002)
"Ballet companies are born with a genetic make-up as potently formative as that of any human. The Royal Ballet was given beliefs by Ninette de Valois… The Royal Ballet conquered the world with a distinctive manner of dancing and dance-making. It is increasingly difficult to reconcile today's Royal Ballet with its past."

'YOU WILL HAVE TO LOOK VERY CAREFULLY TO FIND THE TANZ'

1980, Tanztheater Wuppertal, Sadler's Wells, London (September 16 1982)
"What has to be said straight away about the Tanztheater Wuppertal, Pina Bausch's ensemble… is that you will have to look very carefully to find the tanz… It is theatre of the currently fashionable kind: disjointed, allusive, illogical, sometimes outrageous, frequently harshly funny… [Bausch] seems to be conducting her own psychoanalysis in public, and involving her troupe of 18 actor-dancers in group therapy in the process."

'VEHEMENT, BOISTEROUS, DEVOID OF SUBTLETY'

The Sleeping Beauty, Cullberg Ballet, The Playhouse, Edinburgh (September 3 1999)
"The [Mats] Ek dance style, which is vehement, boisterous, devoid of subtlety – it would suit television advertisements for motor-car airbags – marches across Tchaikovsky like an invading horde… I listened in despair as the Playhouse audience laughed merrily at Ek's ham-fisted activities and his noxious jokes."

'A VITALITY AND AN EMOTIONAL DIRECTNESS'

Breakin' Convention, Sadler's Wells, London (May 22 2004)
"The urgency of [hip-hop dance], its extraordinary truthfulness as manifestation of a social condition since it was born of the emotions and alienation of young black men, and born also of their music and the newest tricks of scratch-DJs, gave it a vitality and an emotional directness that one rarely finds in classical ballet today."

'AN INTEGRITY THAT NO AMOUNT OF ADULATION HAS CORRUPTED'

L'Après-midi d'un Faune/The Prodigal Son, Royal Ballet, Royal Opera House, London (October 31 1973)
"We may associate Rudolf Nureyev with all the paraphernalia of the 'star', with temperament and sweeping cloaks… but he is also – and I suspect that this is sometimes overlooked – an artist of deep perceptions, and an integrity that no amount of adulation and fan worship has corrupted. Against all odds, even against his own legend, he will give performances that owe nothing to his star persona and everything to his artistry."

'THE HUMAN FRAME AS EXPRESSIVE INSTRUMENT'

Swan Lake, Mariinsky Ballet, Royal Opera House, London (August 11 2009)
"The Mariinsky's Swan Lake is a palimpsest. Beneath its noble physical means are a century's intense consideration about what classical ballet can mean and how best to show its aspirations, actual and spiritual. This may seem highfalutin, but ballet's ardours… tell how it can become ritual – proposing an ideal through its insistence on the betterment of the human frame as expressive instrument."

'UNPROVOKED EXPOSURE TO EUROTRASH DANCE'

i Said i, Rosas Dance Troupe, Barbican Theatre (September 10 2001)
"I suppose we must be at war with Belgium. How else to explain the vicious attack on the Barbican's public by the Brussels-based troupe Rosas under the command of Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker on Thursday night?… This was unprovoked exposure to Eurotrash dance – as horrible in its way as napalm – and I report on the event with scars still fresh."

'AN ICE-SHOW REJECTED BY A LAS VEGAS CASINO'

Spartacus, Mikhailovsky Ballet, London Coliseum (July 25 2008)
"The production looks as if millions of roubles have been thrown at it, and resembles nothing so much as an ice-show rejected by a Las Vegas casino as being too gaudy. It sets the art of ballet back by 100 years."

'A VITAL PART OF OUR NATIONAL HERITAGE'

Kenneth Macmillan: An Appreciation (October 1 1992)
*"As a choreographer [Kenneth Macmillan] was, in his most searching works, custodian of a gift, his genius, which took possession of him. He made what he made because he had to. Superb theatre-craft was consciously his and an unfailing ability to shape new and stimulating movement, but the creative drive was deep-seated and mysterious…
His creations give a new maturity to ballet in our time. They are a vital part of our national heritage, and of the dance of our century."* FT

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INSIDE Should you film your server? **P43**

Appetites

Wine

Hard times in northern California

by JANCIS ROBINSON

ILLUSTRATION *by* DEBORA SZPILMAN

Last month I received an email headed "Napa Valley's Secret: Aldi Just Dropped a £13 Cabernet That Rivals £2,000 Wines".

Along with Burgundy in general, Napa Cabernet is a wine category widely perceived as overpriced. Many American wine consumers regard $100 a bottle as a starting price. So the buying team at Aldi was understandably proud to have snagged an example that was so cheap they could afford to offer it at £12.99 a bottle, and have since discounted it to £9.69. The press release compared it with Screaming Eagle, a cult wine with an average price per bottle of over £2,500, which seemed quite a stretch. And an even bigger one once I'd tasted Aldi's 2023 blend. My tasting note: "Deep purple but with a very pale rim. Might Mega Purple colouring have been added? Tastes sweet and as though oak chips have played a part. Scrawny, sudden finish. I really couldn't recommend this, but it's certainly a wake-up call for Napa supply and demand."

Another Napa Cabernet to have popped up in a UK supermarket recently tastes much more appealing and should

JANCIS RECOMMENDS

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA WINES

Proof that it's not all about expensive Napa Cab: some other exciting wines tasted on my recent trip, during which I was often shown a vintage not yet in commercial circulation. UK stockists have been given where possible; the lowest US price on Wine-searcher.com otherwise.

WHITES

- **Dry Creek Vineyards, Fume Blanc 2023 Sonoma County (13%)**
  2023 IS £18.42 VINATIS
- **Idlewild, Lost Hills Ranch Arneis 2023 Yorkville Highlands, Mendocino (11.5%)**
  2023 IS $23
- **Desire Lines, Cole Ranch Riesling 2023 Mendocino County (12.9%)**
  2023 IS $25
- **Grgich Hills, Fumé Blanc 2023 Napa Valley (13.5%)**
  2023 IS $28.99
- **Smith Madrone, Estate Riesling 2021 Spring Mountain District (13.2%)**
  2021 IS $40
- **Ridge Vineyards, Grenache Blanc 2024 Paso Robles (13.4%)**
  2024 IS £42 THE WINE SOCIETY
- **Bruliam, Heintz Chardonnay 2023 Sonoma Coast (13.1%)**
  2022 IS $65
- **Peay, Maritima Chardonnay 2023 West Sonoma Coast (13%)**
  2022 IS $72
- **Grgich Hills, Chardonnay 2022 Napa Valley (14.1%)**
  2022 IS £61.95 LEA & SANDEMAN
- **Ramey, Westside Farms Estate Chardonnay 2022 Russian River Valley (13.5%)**
  2022 IS $69.98. 2021 IS £88 BERRY BROS & RUDD
- **Rudd, Mt Veeder Estate Sauvignon Blanc 2023 Napa Valley (13.2%)**
  2023 IS $119.95
- **Hudson, Seashell Chardonnay 2023 Los Carneros (14.7%)**
  2022 IS $120.27
- **La Jota, WS Keyes Vineyard Chardonnay 2021 Howell Mountain (13.5%)**
  2021 IS $147.90

PINKS

- **Martha Stoumen, Rosato No 5 Negroamaro NV Mendocino (12.5%)**
  $31.94
- **Gallica, Estate Rosé 2024 St Helena (13.5%)**
  2024 IS $32

REDS

- **Ramey, Syrah 2021 Sonoma Coast (14.5%)**
  2021 IS $41.94 – A BARGAIN!
- **Ridge Vineyards, Three Valleys 2023 Sonoma County (14.5%)**
  2023 IS £37.50 JAMES NICHOLSON, £40 HEDONISM AND MANY OTHER INDEPENDENTS
- **Gallica, Rossi Ranch Grenache 2023 Sonoma Valley (14.5%)**
  2022 IS $48.95
- **Idlewild, Lost Hills Ranch Nebbiolo 2019 Yorkville Highlands, Mendocino (13.1%)**
  2019 IS $60
- **Williams Selyem, Rochioli Riverblock Pinot Noir 2022 Russian River Valley (14.2%)**
  £211.15 VINVM

TASTING NOTES, SCORES AND SUGGESTED DRINKING DATES ON JANCISROBINSON.COM. INTERNATIONAL STOCKISTS ON WINE-SEARCHER.COM

still concern those involved in the northern California wine scene. As signalled in my round-up of red wine recommendations recently, Tesco has been offering an Oakville Cabernet 2023, from one of the most admired of Napa Valley's subregions, at £16.50.

This Oakville wine comes from Navigator Wine Collection, an outfit in the southern suburbs of the city of Napa that buys up surplus wine and finds markets for it. The company, owned by well-known French-Californian vintner Jean-Charles Boisset, whose other labels are much more upmarket, expects to post growth of more than 20 per cent this year. This must be a record for any northern California wine company.

During a few days in northern California a couple of months ago I saw and heard no shortage of evidence of a slump there. A significant proportion of vines – put at around 20 per cent by industry insiders – had a band of purple grapes still hanging from them, clearly left unpicked because there was no buyer for them. And these were not in marginal districts but in some of Napa's most hallowed ground. Even more poignant were the dead vine trunks lying in neat piles on completely bare land – the vines having been pulled out, perhaps because of the red blotch virus for which there is no known cure, but perhaps because their produce is surplus to requirements. The California Association of Winegrape Growers reports that 38,134 acres of vineyards, or 8 per cent of the total, had already been pulled out between October 2024 and August 2025 and it looks as though this is continuing.

In Sonoma, just west of Napa, I spent a morning with three relatively young producers of fairly unconventional wine, the bottles labelled to attract their contemporaries, bearing names such as Heart and Hummingbird, Garden Gnome, The Rebel and Hero's Journey.

> Wine producers are pulling in their horns. This means there are massive bargains to be had

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These were not Napa Cabernets but less conventional, cheaper grapes, and blends from less famous appellations. I'd met one of these vintners, Hardy Wallace, before when he was making low-intervention wines labelled Dirty & Rowdy. His label is now Extradimensional Wine Co Yeah. You get the picture. I loved his blood orange-coloured blend of long-macerated Chenin Blanc and white Rhône grapes tinted with red Grenache from Monterey as well as his early-picked Mourvedre from ancient vines in the sands of the Evangelho vineyard in Contra Costa County east of San Francisco. Having made wine for 17 years, he got to the point of making small lots of 18 different wines each year but he has not made a drop of wine in 2025. He can't find a bank to provide a line of credit since the wine sector is currently viewed as high-risk.

European wines rushed into the US in anticipation of the imposition of import tariffs are now clogging up the system, while exports to California's most important export market Canada have evaporated. "The tariffs have destroyed both export and east coast business," he told me. "New York and Florida haven't taken anything because they are loaded up with imports." Meanwhile, media headlines dwell on the shrinking sales of wine in general in the US. "And we're not the only ones," Wallace added. "We're doing the best work we've ever done but at the moment I can't see any light at the end of the tunnel."

FIRST SIP

A NORTHERN CALIFORNIA PRIMER

Napa Valley is the most famous American wine region but it accounts for less than 4 per cent of all US wine.

Cabernet Sauvignon is its flagship variety and the most expensive "Napa Cabs" are even more expensive than their prototypes, Bordeaux's first growths. Increasingly, and rather unexpectedly, fashionable are Napa Sauvignon Blancs.

Modern Napa Valley wine was founded by ambitious farmers but an increasing proportion of Napa Valley wine is produced by well-heeled incomers whose wineries can sometimes seem like vanity projects. Farming is commonly the responsibility of vineyard management companies employing extremely skilful Mexican workers.

To the north-west of Napa is Sonoma County, a less developed region associated with Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and old-vine Zinfandel. Even further north are Mendocino and, less often seen on wine labels, Lake Counties, whose grapes and wines tend to be relatively well priced.

Napa Valley Cabernet producers who once loftily allocated their wines are now finding that such distributors as still exist (there has been a dramatic contraction of them) are buying on a "just in time" basis. Everywhere, inventory is stacking up.

Growers are in an even worse position. They need to sell grapes rather than wine, but wine producers are pulling in their horns. There are tales of cancelled grape contracts all along the west coast – this after growers have financed a whole year of grape growing and either a season's fees to a vineyard management company or the salaries of their own vineyard crews. This means there are massive bargains to be had. And not just the bulk wines that operators such as Navigator Wine Collection are able to pick up for a song. At that Sonoma tasting I was told that one winery was offering 200 new French barrels on Craigslist.

The market contraction even seems to be affecting those at the very top of the tree. The Heitz Cellar bottling of intense Cabernet Sauvignon from Martha's Vineyard in Rutherford, Napa Valley, is world-famous and one of California's first vineyard-designated wines. This year, for the first time in more than 50 years, the owners, the May family, have offered fruit for sale to buyers other than Heitz (where visits are priced at up to $350 per person plus tax).

SOME MAY SEE THE TRIFECTA OF RED blotch, changing tastes and shrinking demand as likely to implement a necessary correction on the market. Vineyards that have been planted in unsuitable sites, such as those that spend much of the winter underwater, will presumably be pulled out. Replanting superior sites should provide a chance to improve clones, rootstocks, vine spacing and row orientation.

But will it encourage a reassessment of pricing? Stu Smith grows the relatively well-priced Smith Madrone wines (Estate Cabernet 2021 is $65) on land cleared in the 1970s out of the forest high up on Spring Mountain on the west side of Napa Valley. He describes the current situation – somewhat gleefully it has to be said – as "a shit show. Prices have been way ahead of quality and that's biting everyone on the behind."

The tasting rooms through which so many producers hope to sell their wine have been quietly reducing their fees. Some wineries are operating dynamic pricing – cheaper during the week – or carefully tiered offerings. Even so, the hordes of visitors to the valley from the Bay Area and Silicon Valley have thinned. The common perception is that young people are less interested in wine than their parents. Aron Weinkauf, long-standing winemaker at Spottswoode in St Helena, maintains, "We need to convince the upcoming generation that wine is as special as we know it to be."

Review

Maneki Ramen, Birmingham

by JAY RAYNER

ILLUSTRATION *by* DANIEL EGNEUS

Ramen is a hobbyist's dream. It's not bish-bash-bosh, chuck-it-in-the-pot cookery. It is a dish for the best kind of nerd; for people who adore measuring everything they are doing, making small but vital changes, chewing the ends of pencils and changing everything again. It is also therefore a world that attracts a certain kind of non-Japanese man – and it really is mostly men here in the UK – who live to fret over broth viscosity, noodle bite and toppings many and various. The work takes place in kitchens, but they are the kind of chaps who would be most happy in a shed at the bottom of the garden, escaping into a culture a very long way from their own. (For more garden-shed culinary nerdiness, see Tim Hayward's deep dive this week into broths.)

The most interesting examples right now are outside London, and the key players often collaborate with each other. In Cardiff there's Matsudai Ramen, from former indie band tour manager James Chant, who happily refers to himself as a geek. In Nottingham there's Everyday People from former *MasterChef* finalist Pete Hewitt. In Birmingham's Kings Heath, above a wine bar and deli, there's the much-admired Koba-Ko, run by chef Sam Hill. In 2020, after stints working at restaurants in Japan and at the famed Eleven Madison Park in New York, chef Pete Dovaston set up his own ramen operation in Worcester. It was

FIND IT

MANEKI RAMEN

21 Ludgate Hill, Birmingham B3 1DW
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manekiramen.com

Small plates £5-£9
Ramen £13.50-£15
Desserts £7.50

originally called Lucky Cat, after the popular waving Japanese figurine, but with all the subtlety of an angry, malfunctioning jackhammer Gordon Ramsay sent a legal letter. He had also opened a Japanese-inspired restaurant of the same name, which had become the subject of online flame wars after he called it "authentic". It can be a complicated world, this one.

In 2021 Dovaston bowed to Ramsay's legal muscle and changed the name to Maneki Ramen. Six months ago, he opened a second outpost in a hefty red-brick building in Birmingham. It's a striking space of sanded wood, rugged stone blocks and dangly wicker lampshades, all patrolled by young staff who are delighted you have decided to spend time with them. Before we get into the quality of the ramen, be aware that this is a culinary subculture patrolled by aficionados who will precisely rank one ramen-monger against another, like it's a game of culinary Top Trumps. They have opinions. They will argue with me because that's part of the fun. I expect to be told Maneki's bowls of noodles, broth and toppings are extremely solid but second rather than first tier. In this culture of small differences, people live for these feverish judgments, so here's mine: Maneki is mostly very good. It takes the essentials seriously.

The tonkotsu ramen features a broth made by simmering piggy parts for most of a day, until it has a creamy collagen-rich stickiness that Instagram beauty influencers would kill for. This causes the surface to crinkle the moment it leaves the kitchen's heat and is boosted by a powerful smoked bacon seasoning mix or "tare" engineered to emphasise its origins. It bobs cheerfully with soft slices of "chashu" pork belly, is dotted with glossy pools of pungent ginger oil, and the noodles have a happy bite. It is a bowl to immerse yourself in, on a chilly day.

A Tokyo shoyu ramen, made with a dashi broth, is a little less successful, because of an unbalanced and bullying portion of meaty shiitake mushrooms standing sentry around the edge. But then there is the vegan tantanmen, a hugely satisfying soy and sesame broth that is creamy and properly spicy, like it wants you to remember its name. It's thick with vegan "mince" from plant-based company Redefine Meat, which is an impressive animal substitute. There is charred corn and kimchi. There are dollops of Sichuan chilli bean paste the colour of turned earth, and glistening dots of sesame oil. There is all the good stuff. As with many of the more ambitious UK ramen places, the noodles are made to their specification by Komugi Noodles in Manchester. And though, perhaps, they could vary the noodles between the different bowls, they are still very good noodles.

But what makes this place sing is the quality of the dishes at either end of the meal. The "zensai" or small plates include smashed cucumber that comes bound with a sesame rich dressing, and dabbed with hot, toasty dollops of that chilli bean paste. Squares of long-cooked then heavily sauced pork belly manage to combine softness with crunch. Chicken wings are crisply battered, half draped in a ginger-soy glaze and dressed with a furikake or seasoning mix including toasted grains. It is all about that shed-at-the-bottom-of-the-garden attention to detail.

Dessert, all too often a soft-serve afterthought in places like this, is here a set of cartwheels and backflips, perhaps drawing on Dovaston's experience in serious western kitchens. A wedge of caramel tart comes precisely topped with a layer of miso custard and sprinkled with a "sweet furikake" mix of crushed nuts and grains. The impressively thin pastry may be a little soft now; doubtless it was perfect yesterday but it's still a classy piece of work.

There is a slab of matcha-flavoured Basque cheesecake, topped with a matcha cream, which is a study in earthy green. The star turn, however, is a hollow sphere of chocolate filled with a deeply fruity chocolate mousse, with a zesty kumquat caramel. Normally you come to a place like this for the steaming bowls of intensely accessorised noodles in broth, and only that. You come to lean in and over. Perhaps you come for a beer or two. Here you get all of that, a short natural wine list, a few cocktails, some killer desserts and eager service. In a city with a fast-developing restaurant culture, Maneki Ramen is quite the proposition. FT

jay.rayner@ft.com

PHOTOGRAPHY *by* ANDY SEWELL • STYLING *by* GEORGIA RUDD

Recipe Club

A rich, restaurant-worthy carbonara

The FT recently launched Ask FT: a generative AI feature that provides answers based only on articles published in this newspaper. Recently I learnt a fun piece of trivia about it. As part of the exhaustive attempts to test it, the FT's nerds tried to find "leakage", meaning the tendency of AI to pull in information from outside its official dataset. One of their tricks was to ask the platform to give a carbonara recipe – the point being that there was not a single carbonara recipe in the FT's archives, so any answers suggesting one would indicate the AI was making a mistake. Naturally, I would never publish a recipe just to mess with my colleagues' research, but I decided it was time to correct this oversight. This carbonara recipe has quickly become the hero dish at Lupa in north London and with good reason. It is extra-yellow, extra-rich and perfect for a time of year when you crave indulgences that look very different from a Christmas dinner.
Harriet Fitch Little

DRINK
Chef Naz Hassan suggests a fruity Italian red: Montepulciano d'Abruzzo or Barbera d'Asti.

SUBSTITUTIONS
You could of course use parmesan instead of pecorino and lardons instead of guanciale, but a simple dish like this comes alive in the details. The use of fresh paccheri is non-traditional but striking – spaghetti is more common.

TIP
Make a vegetarian version with courgettes cooked in a generous amount of olive oil to replicate the fat of the guanciale.

LUPA'S CARBONARA

TO SERVE FOUR AS A FIRST COURSE, IN THE ITALIAN STYLE

- 50g guanciale
- 4 egg yolks
- 1 whole egg
- 100g pecorino, finely grated, plus more for topping
- 1 tsp black pepper
- 450g pasta, fresh paccheri for preference
- 60g cooking water from the pasta

1. Slice the guanciale into 1.5cm cubes. Fry in a hot, dry pan until crisp, then remove the guanciale and keep the fat aside.
2. In a bowl, combine the egg yolks, whole egg, pecorino, black pepper and the guanciale fat and whisk until you get a uniform cream consistency.
3. Cook the pasta in a pot of boiling water and drain it, retaining 100g cooking water. Place the pasta in a pan with 20g of water and cook on medium high heat for approximately one minute.
4. Once the water is disappearing, add the carbonara cream and take the pot off the heat. Keep stirring, adding the additional 40g of cooking water until you've reached a silky consistency. Add the guanciale. Top with more pecorino.

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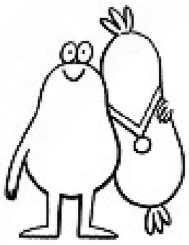

LONDON'S WARMING PIES FOR WINTER

by NOKX MAJOZI

SWANKY

HIERARCHY OF PLEASURES

SIMPLE

Lobster pie for two
Mount Street
This pie is really indulgent and inviting. The filling is wonderful – lots of big chunks of lobster, the dough is super buttery but quite light, and they even use the lobster shell to make a beautiful bisque. It's a very glamorous Mayfair experience.

Fish pie, Bentley's
It's hard to beat a proper fish pie. I love seafood, so appreciate that you can have prawns, smoked haddock, cod and salmon. This one is nice and creamy, aromatic with dill and really filling. It warms my heart. Bentley's isn't cheap – it's Mayfair again – but the fish pie is £34, which isn't too bad.

Spiced rabbit pie for two
St John Bread & Wine
There's something so lovely about sharing a pie, and that's especially true at St John. It's usually a pot pie, so just a lid, but the pastry is always special, really lovely and rich. Suet was one of the first pastries that I liked, so this is a particular favourite of mine. There's something at once understated yet grand about it.

Pie and mash, M Manze
The first time I tried pie and mash, I wondered what the hell I was eating. I was more used to high-end pies. But now I'm a big fan. I love the ritual of it – the mash, the parsley liquor, the chilli vinegar. And that it's not too much – it's just a simple pie: good meat and pastry.

Chicken bake, Greggs
There's a reason this is so popular – it's a really affordable classic that actually tastes quite nice. I like that you don't even need to wait until lunchtime, you can get it in the morning. I don't go to Greggs often, but when I'm travelling and need something quick, it's perfect.

As told to Josh Barrie.
Nokx Majozi is chef in residence at Fallow and a former head pie maker at Holborn Pie Room

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SERVER'S NOTEBOOK

I'm here to feed you, not your Insta

by BOSUN SMEE

ILLUSTRATION *by* ALICE PIAGGIO

WHEN I FIRST STARTED WORKING AT A POPULAR Tasmanian bakery, my manager was quick to warn me that the customers love to film in the shop, so much so that there were signs on display to protect our privacy. I thought she was joking, but at the end of my first shift I saw the two notices she had mentioned, thanking customers for their support and enthusiasm but requesting that our faces were not photographed or filmed. I didn't think much of it at the time. I couldn't imagine customers armed with smartphones causing any great disruption to my day.

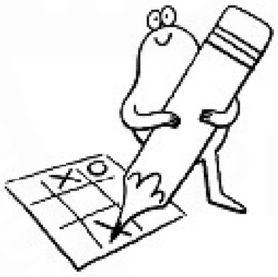
But fast forward a week, I realised the shop wasn't just a popular bakery, it was an "Insta-famous hotspot". We weren't just at work, we were frequently unwilling extras in someone's Reels.

The bakery is an institution of sorts, a popular destination for foodie-tourists and locals alike. Unfortunately, in this era of ubiquitous self-documentation, this means constant filming. I don't just mean taking pictures of our artfully presented displays, after all a still life of delicious pastries and baked goods makes some sort of sense. What doesn't is people coming in with the sole purpose of shooting content for Instagram and TikTok, sometimes staging a whole production to do so. Setting their food up, going outside to get establishing shots, filming the treats they are about to eat, as well as their interactions with us when they're ordering.

It's not unusual to be halfway through making a coffee, look up over the steamwand and see a phone recording the process. I've lost count of how many times I've heard my co-workers ask a customer to kindly stop recording them. It's more than a little irritating and inconsiderate, and as disruptive as it is invasive. To say nothing of the safety issues posed. Don't my colleagues and I have a right to privacy, to go about the business of our day without being harangued by influencers recording us?

While being front of house is, by its nature, very public-facing, this new filming phenomenon exploits that aspect of the work. One only needs to watch the viral TikTok filmed by a difficult customer at Fortitude Bakehouse in London, starring a patient and polite – though understandably frustrated – employee, to see how problematic this can be. A bad day at work suddenly became entertainment for millions of people without her consent.

I'm lucky. I have a protective boss and confident colleagues. We can, and do, push back. But nobody should be comfortable with this becoming normal. It's not a question of vanity. I can live with the receding hairline and crow's feet. I'd just prefer my unguarded moments didn't live on in the foreverness of an insatiable internet, that I had the right to control my presence online. FT



GAMES

MINI CROSSWORD

NO 90 SET BY XELA

8 clues
2 straightforward
2 general knowledge
2 cryptic
2 anagrams

1		2		3		4
	■		■		■	
5						
	■		■		■	
6						
	■		■		■	
7						

ACROSS
- **1** Clobber (7)
- **5** Sell art (7)
- **6** Tolerant (7)
- **7** Stay firm (7)

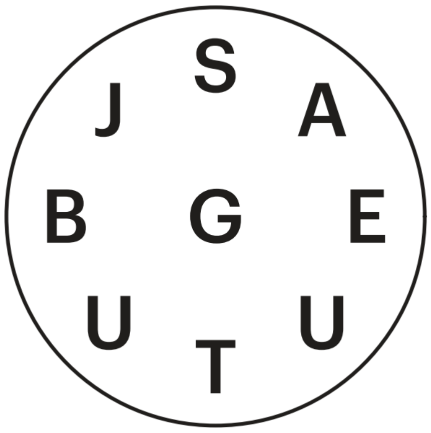
DOWN
- **1** Act less (7)
- **2** Australia's region (7)
- **3** Hans ___ the Younger, court painter to Henry VIII (7)
- **4** Extend time inside (7)

Access FT crosswords from the past 30 days – Cryptic, Polymath, Weekend and Sunday Puzzles – on ft.com/crosswordapp

WORD CIRCLE

NO 90

How many words can you form that use the centre letter plus two or more of the other letters? No letter may be used more times than it appears within the circle. There is one word that uses all nine letters.



SCORING
GOOD – 45
GREAT – 55
AMAZING – 75

BINARY PUZZLE

NO 90

Place 0 or 1 in every empty square so there is an equal number of each digit in every row and column. In any row or column, there must be no more than two of the same digit in succession.

0	0			1		1	
0	0			1			
	1	0	1	0	1	0	
			0			0	1
1	1			0			
	0	1	0	1	0	1	
			1			0	0
	1		1			0	0

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SOLUTIONS

FOR ISSUE DATE
DECEMBER 20

Mini Crossword No 89

S	N	A	F	F	L	E
U	■	T	■	A	■	X
R	A	T	T	R	A	P
F	■	R	■	N	■	A
A	G	A	K	H	A	N
C	■	C	■	A	■	D
E	N	T	O	M	B	S

Binary Puzzle No 89

0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1
1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0
0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0
1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1
1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0
1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0

Word circle No 89

deem, deep, deer, defer, deform, doe, doer, dome, dope, dormer, drop, emperor, ere, erode, err, erred, fed, fee, feed, foe, fop, for, ford, fore, form, formed, former, free, freed, freedom, freer, fro, from, mere, mode, mop, mope, moped, more, ode, order, ore, peer, per, perform, **performed**, pod, poem, pore, pored, prefer, pro, prod, prom, red, redo, reed, reef, refer, reform, reformed, rod, rode, roe, romp, romped, romper, rope, roped

THIS WEEK'S QUIZ ANSWERS

A round on the link

The link was things that can be "double"
1. Dutch (Suriname)
2. Bed bug 3. *Top Gun*
4. Read the riot act
5. Mary Decker
6. Whiskey 7. *The Bill*
8. Negative
9. "All About that Bass"
10. Gold Standard

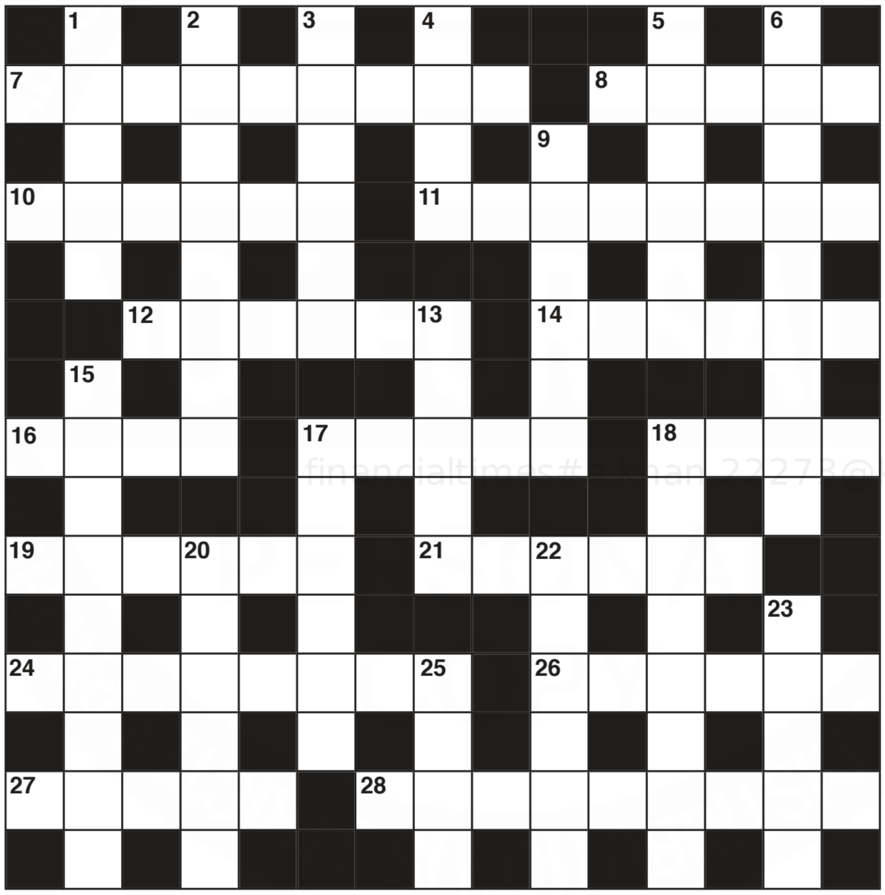
The picture round

Jane Russell + Jack Hobbs
= Russell Hobbs

financialtimes#...@khi.ba...

THE CROSSWORD

NO 774 SET BY ALDHELM



The Across clues are straightforward, while the Down clues are cryptic.

ACROSS

- **7** Very clever (9)
- **8** Ancient British priest (5)
- **10** Tree-lined street (6)
- **11** Lovely, very attractive (8)
- **12** Stink (6)
- **14** Saturate (6)
- **16** Midday (4)
- **17** Thug (5)
- **18** Romantic appointment (4)
- **19** Coercion, pressure (6)
- **21** Beat soundly (6)
- **24** Forward movement (8)
- **26** Small prawn (6)
- **27** Worker in metal (5)
- **28** Person experimented upon (6, 3)

DOWN

- **1** Right inside bestowed vault (5)
- **2** Little sea-dweller's to work out tangled knot (8)
- **3** Bird and farm animal one trained (6)
- **4** Tin with silver catch (4)
- **5** Easy task to get French cheeses for the audience (6)
- **6** Ace fruit chopped up under top of banana split (9)
- **9** Link top of border to mountain crest (6)
- **13** Search around a favourite spot (5)
- **15** Perform with copper – quick drink before a real-life story (9)
- **17** Hamper speculation without question (6)
- **18** Chaos of old tapestry being put up in home improvements (8)
- **20** Even characters in cast, we hear, are a big number (6)
- **22** One's in group rebelling (6)
- **23** Confines a doctor with computer tech (5)
- **25** Dish is likewise finished (4)

Crossword No 773

V	E	N	D	E	T	T	A	■	M	E	N	A	C	E
■	G	■	A	■	R	■	M	■	O	■	E	■	U	■
C	O	R	N	E	A	■	E	N	T	R	E	A	T	■
■	T	■	C	■	T	■	R	■	E	■	D	■	I	■
D	I	R	E	C	T	O	R	■	T	W	I	T	C	H
■	S	■	■	■	O	■	Y	■	■	■	N	■	L	■
■	M	E	T	E	R	■	C	A	T	S	E	Y	E	S
■	■	■	A	■	I	■	H	■	R	■	S	■	■	■
A	R	M	C	H	A	I	R	■	O	N	S	E	T	■
■	I	■	T	■	■	■	I	■	J	■	■	■	U	■
S	C	R	I	B	E	■	S	C	A	B	B	A	R	D
■	K	■	C	■	G	■	T	■	N	■	E	■	M	■
■	E	P	I	G	R	A	M	■	W	I	N	D	O	W
■	T	■	A	■	E	■	A	■	A	■	I	■	I	■
C	Y	G	N	E	T	■	S	T	R	A	N	G	L	E

GETTY IMAGES

A ROUND ON THE LINKS

BY JAMES WALTON

All the answers here are linked in some way. Once you've spotted the connection, any you didn't know the first time around should become easier.

1. What's the official language of the smallest country in South America?
2. What's the common two-word alliterative name for the parasitic insect *Cimex lectularius*?
3. Which film, which had a 2022 sequel, was the highest grossing worldwide in 1986?
4. Which phrase meaning "to severely reprimand" derives from a 1715 piece of British legislation?
5. Which American athlete fell during the 3000m final of the 1984 Olympics after a collision with the Great Britain runner Zola Budd (*pictured*)?
6. What's the only letter of the Nato alphabet to contain a possessive pronoun in the middle?
7. According to IMDb, which UK police drama ran for 2,404 episodes?
8. What type of electrical charge does an electron carry?
9. What was Meghan Trainor's multimillion-selling debut single of 2014?
10. Which international monetary system did Britain rejoin in 1925 and leave again in 1931?

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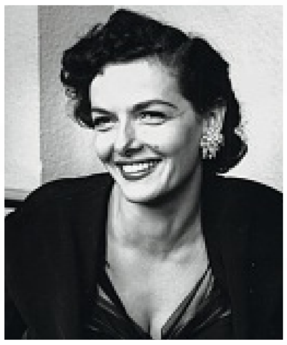
THE PICTURE ROUND

BY JAMES WALTON

Who or what do these pictures add up to?



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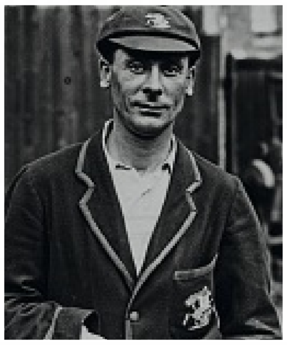

= ?

Answers opposite

ILLUSTRATION *by* LUCAS VARELA

What Fresh Hell

Should I hand over my socials to Trump?

Work, life and family dilemmas solved by *Robert Shrimsley*

Why not? You're already giving them to Elon Musk. And would you trust Mark Zuckerberg not to roll over on the first demand from the White House?

Even so, the news that people wishing to visit the US as tourists may now have to hand over details of all their social media accounts for the past five years is bound to alarm some, especially those who've watched videos of America's ICE officers, whose methods make even RyanAir look customer friendly.

It is enough to put anyone off going to the US. Clearly, if you were unable to resist a joke about the assassination attempt on Trump or made the kind of unpleasant remarks about the murder of Charlie Kirk that one really only associates with the Oxford Union, well then, yes, you may find your Immigration experience more memorable that you would wish.

But frankly, your social media is already at least semi-public and it is already well within the wit of US authorities to comb through anything you have posted. Perhaps you are giving more explicit permission to the administration and the private companies run by its tech bro pals to purloin even more data and metadata from your posts but does anyone think Trump-led agencies aren't going to be doing that if they feel like it anyway? So given the sweeping surveillance and rendition powers the US has claimed for itself there is probably no great added risk in granting permission for something it will do anyway if it chooses. The main impact then may be to make you think twice about criticising the US or Trump regime. Be too rude and you might find your late-night TV show cancelled.

And it is natural to worry about the ends to which your data will be used. You don't want Trump himself getting edit access to your posts, otherwise you will wake up one morning to discover that you are marketing cryptocurrency.

Still we should not be too flippant. While there are understandable reasons for the US seeking this information, the dangers must be all too apparent. Your social media posts will reveal if you are a dangerous conspiracy theorist or political extremist. One word in the wrong place and you might be invited on to *The Tucker Carlson Show*. The consequences could be even more serious. US officials will be combing through your feeds. One foolish hardline post and you could find yourself co-opted into the administration.

> One word in the wrong place and you're a guest on *The Tucker Carlson Show*

This is the real nightmare: you go to the US for a fortnight's holiday and end up getting appointed as health and human services secretary. One minute you are waiting to go to Disneyworld, the next you are banning vaccines and having to drink raw milk. A single stray Substack post about how "civilisation in London has been destroyed" and you'll find yourself writing the US government's national security strategy.

Any tweets suggesting a basic ignorance about monetary policy and you could end up competing with Liz Truss to be the next chair of the Federal Reserve.

Even so, for those who veer the other way and are uneasy about revealing their criticisms of Trump, there are some strategies to be deployed, other than holidaying in Canada. List your LinkedIn profile as your main social media outlet and, with luck, you will wear down the surveillance teams with your blatant self-promotion or reflections on the ways to succeed in business. You can also relax about giving over details of your Threads profile, since you haven't posted on it for two years.

Unless you are a demented political activist, your Facebook and Instagram profiles ought to be reasonably safe. Trump is not interested in other people's children. Your X feed could be more contentious but, unless you are Tommy Robinson, Elon's algorithms will have ensured no one saw what you posted. If you are planning a visit, it might be worth joining Trump's Truth Social. No one you know is a member so you can post some over-the-top praise of the Prez and they'll probably zip you through the fast channel at customs.

Finally, you could simply see this as an opportunity. Fill your feed with detailed criticism of the Trump administration. Lament his relationship with Vladimir Putin. Raise the alarm about checks and balances or the outsize influence of tech oligarchs. Remember you've got a captive audience and some of them need to hear this. FT

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VIEW THE FILM

Winter 2025/26

FT Appetites

The joy of January

Recipes, tips and stories
from food lovers who come
alive in the cold season

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by *Jay Rayner*

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WELCOME TO THE MOST LIMINAL WEEKEND of the year. Traditionally, this is a time for digestion, both corporeal and mental: assess the past year; select goals for the next; then revel in the last few days before you have to actually implement them. But what if January was something to look forward to, rather than be conquered? In this magazine, we've rounded up a merry band of chefs and food lovers who can say hand-on-heart that they are looking forward to the cold season. Why? Because this is the month for extravagant cooking projects you would never otherwise have time for (page 16); the month of getting weirdly, unashamedly obsessed with perfecting a single recipe (page 6); the month you can take up time and space in restaurants without fear of the next booking (page 14). It may also be the month of no drinking (page 22) or of thinking more carefully about where your vitamins are coming from (page 13), but even those bits can be fun if you decide to make them so. Whatever you choose to do, all that matters is what Jay Rayner commands on page 16: "Do not go gentle into that dark-at-4pm night." January has too much to offer.

Harriet Fitch Little, FT Magazine food & drink editor

FT APPETITES
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ft.com/food-drink

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By *Tatyana Isaac*

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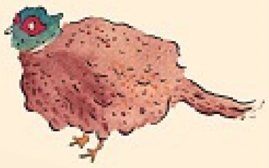
A month of fundays

Why reserve advent calendars for December? Here, chefs share 31 ways to bring fun, flavour and culinary discovery to the long month ahead
By Cherish Rufus

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
5 ● If a month of sobriety doesn't speak to you, try a different type of dry January: Trivet co-founder and master sommelier Isa Bal suggests using January to work your way through some pleasant dry white wines. His favourite: Greco di Tufo from Campania.	6 ● Do as the French do and celebrate Epiphany by making a galette des rois (king cake). Chef Ben Lippett says they're endlessly versatile. Some of his favoured flavours: rhubarb and almond; smoky celeriac and reblochon; duck and prune.	7 If you've had your fill of roast dinners, chef Stevie Parle suggests making a curry. A delicate coconut fish curry with south Indian vegetables, like the one at his restaurant Town, or maybe Thai. Either way, "no more roast potatoes".
12 ● ● A butcher is for life, not just for the Christmas run-up. Akub chef Fadi Kattan recommends asking them to talk you through the different cuts and how to cook ones you're unfamiliar with – "It's a good time of year to learn something new."	13 ● Go touch grass, then do one better and use it as a chance to go foraging. Rafael Cagali, chef-owner of Maré, Da Terra and Elis, points out that foraging serves so many purposes: time outside, exercise and a chance to reconnect with nature while also replenishing your pantry.	14 ● ● In Thailand, January marks the end of the main rice harvest, says Luke Farrell, chef-founder of Speedboat Bar and Plaza Khao Gaeng. It's a time to pickle, preserve and plan for the year ahead.
19 ● Think local when it comes to your produce. Lulu's & Llewelyn's executive chef Lasse Petersen says we shouldn't overlook the British winter crops that shine now: winter leaves are sweeter after frost, citrus is at its best, brassicas and roots are beautiful raw.	20 ● This is nights-on-the-sofa season. Take a page out of Vincenzo's Pizza founder Tom Vincent's book and let TV inspire you in the kitchen. In his case, rewatching *The Sopranos* and *Goodfellas* translated into making dishes like spicy vodka rigatoni and meatballs in tomato sauce.	21 ● Make the most of game season as it draws to a close. In Jeremy Lee's opinion, this is when pheasant is at its best.
26 ● ● ● A great way to make good use of root vegetables is to make a batch of kimchi. This is when Duncan Robertson and Kyu Jeon from Dongnae and Bokman make and eat lots of cleansing water kimchi – a sweet, crunchy, refreshing type of kimchi made with a watery broth that can be used as a base for cold noodles.	27 ● ● Project cooking doesn't need to involve grand French recipes. Grace & Savour's chef director David Taylor says January is the perfect time to learn how to make fried chicken and donuts. "It's a rewarding, seasonal project that turns cooking into a true winter pleasure."	28 ● ● If you're craving something sweet, Higher Ground's Joseph Otway points out that post-harvest winter squash converts its stored starches into sugar as "a kind of natural antifreeze". This additional sweetness and flavour makes them perfect for desserts. He suggests baking something or candying them.



- ● Outing
- ● Drinks
- ● Hosting
- ● Kitchen project
- ● Meat
- ● Fruit & vegetables
- ● Prep ahead
- ● Sweet treat
- ● Travel

Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
1 ● January is here. But it might be wise to wean yourself off the indulgence slowly. Graham Chatham, chef-patron at Origin City in London's Farringdon, recommends this as the time to add a wee dram of whisky to your morning porridge before a bracing walk in the countryside.	2 ● Is your home still cluttered with holiday indulgences? Cookbook author Gurdeep Loyal makes the valid point that almost all Christmas confectionery doubles as excellent fudge flavours: leftover chocolate, random liqueurs, salty snacks like pretzels. Buy a tin of condensed milk and make your own.	3 ● ● Speaking of clutter, this is also a good moment to finally deal with your freezer. Yotam Ottolenghi suggests January as the time to tackle the roasted vegetables, chicken carcasses and parmesan rinds that have been piling up all year. He suggests making broths to use in soups and stews or freeze to use throughout the year.	4 ● ● ● Back to work tomorrow? Use the last of your holidays to make a hearty braise. Manteca co-founder and chef Chris Leach says slow-cooking beef like short ribs, cheek or tail is well worth it at the start of the year. It'll yield plentiful leftovers.
8 ● As we turn to nourishing soups, stews and hearty winter vegetables, try ALTA head chef Rob Roy Cameron's top tip: brighten up bulky dishes with a splash of sharp sherry vinegar or citrus zest.	9 ● January is the perfect time to visit Italy, says Quo Vadis chef-patron Jeremy Lee. Feast on freshly picked persimmon, enhanced by frost, the flavour becoming sweeter and more concentrated; or dine on pork roast with prunes, fennel, herbs and bitter leaves grilled over embers.	10 ● ● Try making pasta from scratch, but don't stop there. Push yourself to be a bit more experimental than usual. Canteen's Jess Filbey suggests trying different shapes and meats, like rabbit for panzotti filling or slow-cooked venison shoulder for venison agnoli.	11 ● ● A barbecue in winter is way better than one in summer, according to cookbook author Joe Woodhouse, and it makes for a fun and unexpected Sunday lunch. Embrace the chance to get outside at a time we typically squirrel away indoors, and use the fire to keep warm.
15 ● Make the most of winter varieties of cabbage. Dinings SW3 executive chef Masaki Sugisaki says you can turn the humble veg into a real showstopper. His go-to is curing it with shio koji (a fermented seasoning), grilling it over charcoal, then enjoying it with creamy mash – and winter truffle if you're feeling decadent.	16 ● In search of a salve for the month's dreary mood? Gurdeep Loyal suggests taking a trip to Lille. There's something restorative about the hearty rustic cooking of traditional Flemish-style restaurants.	17 ● Christmas was weeks ago, and payday is still weeks away. Now is the time to host friends rather than frequent restaurants, says George Williams of The Fat Badger. Keep it simple: soups and spicy things.	18 ● ● Try your hand at making your own ice cream. Jonny Lake, co-founder and head chef at Trivet, recommends using leftover Terry's chocolate oranges from the festive season for a sweet, zesty and creamy treat.
22 Find new ways to eat light but comforting food. Ukrainian chef Olia Hercules recommends exploring refreshing sour flavours; reinvigorate a chicken soup with the addition of grated fermented cucumbers and their brine.	23 ● A trip to the coast isn't just for summer. Rockfish restaurateur Mitch Tonks takes advantage of this slow period by packing up the car and visiting all the seafood restaurants he couldn't get to in summer. Top of his list this January is Riley's Fish Shack in Tynemouth.	24 ● ● As another Sunday approaches, it's time to think local. Luca's chef Robert Chambers thinks now is a particularly important time to support farmers' markets. Plus you're out less so the food you're cooking at home matters more. Make a day of it to brighten a grey one.	25 ● Throw a Burns Supper, suggests Murano's Angela Hartnett, who usually has a Burns Night party at home. On the menu? Scottish dancing and haggis.
29 ● ● It's peak citrus season, so take full advantage of it. Chris Shaw, head chef at Toklas, uses this quieter period to preserve his haul, making citrus marmalades, citrus curds and candied citrus peel.	30 ● ● If making the most of citrus season speaks to you and you're also looking to get a way for a long weekend, now is the best time to visit Valencia, Spain. Baker Nicola Lamb says a tour of the Todoli Citrus Foundation is a must.	31 ● ● Congratulations, you have made it through the month. Your reward: the first sighting of forced rhubarb, which Lamb always looks forward to. She suggests poaching or roasting the lot to enjoy on everything.	

Take a deep broth…

BY Tim Hayward

financialtimes#a.khan.22273@khi.iba.edu.pk
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PHOTOGRAPHY BY Emli Bendixen • STYLING BY Ellie Mulligan • PROP STYLING BY Alexander Breeze

I want to talk about British broth. It is January. We are galvanised with enthusiasm and have ample time to experiment. Plus, our contemporary national cuisine is massively eclectic and draws promiscuously from everywhere. There could be no better time to look at everyone else's (better) broth dishes to see if they can help us reimagine, reappropriate, redefine, rethink a national broth dish of which we can be proud. ☞

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LEFT: Tortellini in brodo – the brodo is where the magic happens

FIRST I WANT TO MAKE SOMETHING ABSOLUTELY clear. I don't mean bone broth. If you think I do, please do not read on. Bone broth doesn't really exist. It was a catchy marketer's alliteration to persuade credulous, already thin neurotics to drink stock. As marketing ideas go, it's as fiendishly brilliant as persuading them to eat salt and calling it "thriving crystals". Stock is a liquid in which proteins or vegetables are simmered to extract their flavour and nourishment. It is referred to as stock in English because it means something that is held for later use.

For most cooks, broth means the liquid in which food has been cooked and is intentionally served as a liquid element of the dish. A slow-poached piece of meat, or perhaps a chicken, might be served with its broth.

A broth that has been thickened with cream or roux is a soup, a gravy or possibly a sauce. If a broth is collaterally thickened by an ingredient that breaks down, then the same applies. Put potatoes, tomatoes or even rice in a broth if you must, but only delicately and at the end of cooking. The moment they break down… I'm sorry, you have crossed what the Rubicon would have been if it had vichyssoise in it. I trust I have made myself limpid.

Unfortunately, by this definition, we Brits are not much good at broth. Wherever you travel around these isles, you'll certainly find one of our of indigenous brown stews. Cawl, for example, which can be clear, but too often the meat is rolled in flour before browning, or scotch broth, which has the right name but has pearl barley added to literally cloud proceedings. Lancashire hotpot is excellent, but often judged critically if one can't stand a spoon in the liquid element.

Clearly, we live in a country that doesn't trust clear broths. Clear broths are for invalids, posh people with special consommé spoons and, God preserve us all… the French.

Is there hope for a proper British broth? I think so.

Let's approach the dish from two angles: the liquid and the contents. Most broth recipes fall into one of these two camps. *All recipes serve four.*

◆ — *It's all about the liquid* — ◆

There are dishes across the world where broth is treated with the respect it deserves. Clear, velvet-textured from the collagen in the slow-cooked meat. Depth supplied by root vegetables and onion and higher flavouring notes from herbs, spices and obsessive seasoning.

It might be served with some other ingredients floating in it, but nobody is making excuses here. The star is the liquid.

***

Tortellini in brodo

This Italian dish requires small pasta parcels with a mixed filling of cheese and meat – which may or may not include pork, veal, chicken, prosciutto and mortadella. There will of course be a family recipe, jealously guarded, and lots of people, including small children with dextrous fingers and terrifying nonnas with opinions, and no compunction about enforcing them. If you can replicate these conditions in your own kitchen, you are truly blessed (and you won't need a recipe from me).

■

MORE LIQUID-CENTRIC BROTHS

CHICKEN SOUP

A proper Jewish chicken soup has almost as many recipes as there are grandmothers in the diaspora, but there are one or two consistent tricks that reassure you that you're dealing with people who truly respect the broth. You start by poaching a chicken in water, then lifting it out while you get on with the actual business. You add aromatic veg and seasonings to the poaching liquid in great abundance, but you then discard them and poach fresh veg in the broth. If you're adding a starch, lokshen (noodles), kreplach (stuffed dumplings, interestingly similar in principle to tortellini) or kneidlach (matzo balls), then true mavens will poach them separately in chicken stock so there's no chance that the broth will be anything but limpid. Finally, almost as an afterthought, shreds of poached chicken can be added back.

RAMEN

Ramen is surprisingly not an ancient Japanese culinary tradition. It was nicked around 1900 from the Chinese, who served lāmiàn pulled noodles in clear, usually beef, broth. But it was always about the liquid, and now it's an international gastronomic phenomenon, the ramen broth obsession has become even deeper. Ramen broth can be based on dashi, a stock made using dried seaweed and smoked bonito flakes, and can take a seemingly endless variety of toppings.

■

MORE BITS-CENTRIC BROTHS

POULE AU POT
The most famous of the European broth classics. The simplest staples of a rural smallholding: a rooster, leeks, turnips, carrots and celery in a presentation so important that it helped shape a nation's politics. In the 17th century, with his country facing famine, King Henry IV of France promised his subjects "a chicken in every pot" every Sunday.

TAFELSPITZ
An Austrian speciality where cuts of beef are slow-poached in a clear stock alongside a reassuringly small selection of root vegetables. In a good restaurant you'll be able to choose the exact cut you want as it's all slow poaching, all day, out the back in an enormous tank, creating a single broth of Wagnerian pomp.

POT AU FEU
Might be the French tafelspitz, or the other way round, but it comprises a variety of collagen-rich beef cuts and, in some recipes, chicken, salt pork, and veal. It's certainly got a touch of "let's clean up the farmyard" about it but, if you doubt the quality of the finished result, consider that many classical recipes specify that the meat should be wrapped in muslin and hung in the poaching liquid to help minimise clouding.

PHŌ
Is pronounced "fuh", or indeed, the same way the French pronounce the "feu" in their national broth dish – which is perhaps not a coincidence given Vietnam's history as a French colony. It is made of several cuts of beef, poached and served in a clear broth deeply flavoured from the very beginning of the long cooking process with anise, ginger, garlic and fish sauce. It's served with noodles, like a lāmiàn… or a ramen… or a lokshen.

If you want to make your tortellini from scratch, there are some very good recipes online. But you'll also find plenty of fresh tortellini in better supermarkets or, ideally, a local Italian deli. The important thing is to pick something with quite a light, bland flavour profile. The brodo is where the magic happens.

This brodo is one of the simplest – in fact, it's the closest to stock – but it also shows that broth-based dishes are all about delicacy and balance.

FOR THE SOFFRITTO
- 2 tbs olive oil
- 300g onion, finely chopped
- 150g celery, finely chopped
- 150g carrot, finely chopped
- 2 tsp garlic, minced

- 1l chicken stock (a good packaged one will work. Your own home-made will have better flavour and texture)
- Chunk of parmesan rind if you have it
- 3 fresh basil leaves
- 250g fresh tortellini
- Salt
- 50g parmesan, grated

1. Sweat the soffritto ingredients in the olive oil, but only barely. To keep the flavours fresh, I avoid any caramelisation.

2. Add the stock and 100g water, and bring to a sub-simmer for two hours. Skim obsessively, using a spoon to scoop off fat or foam, because, at least in the eyes of your nonna, your brodo will be judged on its clarity. This is the transubstantiation stage, where stock magically becomes broth.

3. I save and freeze parmesan cheese rinds and drop them into my brodo as it develops. They add flavours without clouding the liquid. Against such a delicate canvas, this has the astonishing effect of almost unbearable umami. This is why the tortellini can be so simple, because the broth is everything. This is why I add the basil right at the end.

4. Strain all the solids out of the broth and, if you wish, cool and refrigerate overnight. It allows the flavours to mellow, and you can skim off even the slightest possibility of fat.

5. To serve, simply cook your tortellini in the brodo, salted to taste. Sprinkle with the grated parmesan.

It's all about the bits

It's here that we can make a sort of turning point in our liquid narrative. These are the dishes that feature a broth but that one could characterise as "more about the solids". Things poached gently in broth take on its flavours, while surrendering their own in glorious combination.

***

Mizutaki

In the Japanese tradition of nabemono (nabe = pot, mono = things), a broth is set up in a large ceramic pot called a donabe and placed on a heat source in the middle of the table, along with piles of ingredients. There are strict culinary and social rules, but, put simply, hard vegetables go into the broth first, followed by fungi and perhaps tofu. Fish, if it's a seafood nabe, is usually added last. Once the poached ingredients have been consumed (usually after dipping in a sauce) the meal can be rounded off by adding rice or cooked noodles to the now enriched broth. If you don't have a donabe, a casserole dish will work.

Shabu shabu and sukiyaki are both types of nabe popular in the west. There are some spectacular fish ones from coastal regions, each with different broths. But I'm particularly fascinated by mizutaki simply because it's so similar to so many other broth traditions worldwide.

FOR THE BROTH
- Kombu seaweed
- 4 bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs
- Thumb of ginger
- 100g mirin
- Clove of garlic, crushed

FOR THE TOPPINGS
- Half a napa cabbage in 6cm chunks
- 3 spring onions in short lengths
- Your favourite Chinese fungi – we used shiitake and shimeiji
- 1 pack of firm tofu cut into six cubes
- 1 head pak choi
- 1 large carrot, shredded with a speed peeler

1. Soak a piece of kombu in two litres of water overnight. This liquid will form the basis of your dashi.

2. Take the bones out of the chicken thighs and cut each thigh into four pieces. Leave the skin on. Put the chicken into a pan of water with the bones and bring to a hard simmer then immediately remove everything and wash in warm running water.

3. Add the rinsed chicken and bones to your dashi along with a small thumb of ginger, the mirin and the garlic. Bring to a simmer and skim until no more scum rises, which shouldn't take more than five minutes. Lower the heat to just below a simmer, then remove the kombu, the ginger and the bones.

4. Arrange the topping ingredients in the broth as it continues to cook. Try to keep them together in bunches. Start with the cabbage and the onions, then after five minutes add the mushrooms and tofu. Finally, add the pak choi and the fine-shredded carrot. Cover and continue to simmer for another 10 minutes or until all ingredients are cooked.

5. Each diner should lift "their" cooked ingredients from the pot into their own bowl, then ladle over some broth. Pre-cooked rice or noodles are added to the remaining broth so no one leaves the table hungry.

RIGHT: Boiled beef and carrots – finally, a British broth worthy of the name

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London's broth spots

◆

By Harriet Fitch Little

Haggerston's **SÔNG QUÊ CAFE** serves some of the city's best phō, with rich aromatic broth. So popular is this part of their menu that the owners are now opening a phō-only restaurant in Spitalfields.

Angela Hartnett's tortellini in brodo obsession runs deep, both in her home cooking and at her restaurant, **MURANO**. The dish appears on the menu on special occasions, including New Year's Eve.

London's best lāmiàn cut noodles in broth (ramen's ancestor) are to be found at the **LANZHOU LAMIAN NOODLE BAR** near Leicester Square – a tiny restaurant where you can watch the noodles being pulled by hand.

At **CAFE DECO**, Anna Tobias often has a broth with eastern European origins on the menu. Recently, this has included golabki in mushroom broth and semolina dumplings in chicken broth.

A good French broth is hard to find in London, but the pot au feu that occasionally appears on the Sunday menu at **MAISON FRANÇOIS** is worth seeking out.

A dish once so fondly loved that there was a hit music-hall song about it

◆ — *Rehabilitating British broth* — ◆

So, by circuitous journey and poaching shamelessly, it's time to reveal a truly British broth.

This is a long-forgotten dish, once so fondly loved by a nation that there was a hit music-hall song about it, recently rediscovered by a few brave chefs. Like pot au feu, it ennobles simple ingredients, leveraging a cheap cut of superb British beef and our very best seasonal carrots. But it depends on the quality of the broth no less than ramen, lokshen or tafelspitz or phō. It's so simple it requires a certain courage to put it out there, but done right, it has all the majestic dignity of the best broth dishes on the planet.

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Boiled beef and carrots

- 1 kg of "cheap cut" beef*
- 2 large carrots, roughly chopped
- 2 stalks celery, roughly chopped
- 1 large white onion, roughly chopped
- 1 large leek, roughly chopped
- About a dozen black peppercorns
- A dozen sprigs of fresh thyme
- A bay leaf

**Brisket tastes sublime, or a thick slice of shank looks pretty on the plate. I also add a beef short rib or a single piece of oxtail, which is a very pot au feu trick.*

1. In a pot, cover the meat with cold water, salt generously and then bring it to a simmer. Then lift the meat out and rinse it off with cold water. Dump the scummy water and clean out the pot.

2. Put the meat back into the pot and cover with cold water again. Add the rest of the ingredients.

3. Bring to a simmer, then back off the heat until you get just the occasional bubble. Cook for four hours, or until the main piece of beef is tender (I like an internal temperature of 95C).

4. Once it's done, lift out the meat and strain your broth through muslin or a clean J-cloth. Throw away the vegetables; they have done their work.

5. The broth should be clear and the meat tender, and at this point, like a brodo, I usually refrigerate overnight and remove any fat that solidifies on the surface.

6. Serving is simple. Put the meat back into the broth. Add two big whole peeled carrots per person and bring back up to a point just south of a simmer. When the carrots are cooked through (test with a skewer), serve with mustard, horseradish or a salsa verde while playing Elgar at terrific volume. ◆

Flavour bombs

*Three nutrient-packed toppings to make brown food sing. By **Helen Graham***

JANUARY. THE MONTH WHERE I want to eat broth, braises and beige foods that speak to my Ashkenazi soul. When it comes to zing and vitamins, I find myself reaching for condiments to do the heavy lifting. Here are three garnishes to add a dose of brightness to your everyday meals: a spicy salsa macha inspired by Mexico (by way of north Africa); a tangy Sri Lankan-influenced onion chutney; and a far from traditional gremolata with sharp barberries and orange zest for an extra boost of vitamin C during the darkest days of the year. Some high-impact and colourful flavour bombs to make the ordinary a little less so.

Helen Graham is the author of "Centrepiece", due out in April (Hamlyn)

FOR PLAIN FOOD

Harissa salsa macha

This condiment traditionally uses dried Mexican chillies. However, this is a bit of a cheat's version, with harissa widely available at most supermarkets. Beware: not all harissas are made the same, and my brand of choice is Lamiri if you can get hold of it. I have this on hand for pretty much anything plain that needs adornment: any kind of boiled or roasted veg is always so much better for a dab of this, as well as rice, eggs, cheese toasties and slow braises. If you also fancy a project, this could be the sign to try your hand at a birria taco to drizzle this on.

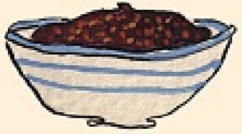
- 130ml neutral oil
- 4 garlic cloves, finely sliced
- 60g unsalted blanched peanuts, roughly chopped
- 30g sesame seeds
- 1 tbs cumin seeds, ground
- ½ tbs ground caraway seeds
- 1 tsp sea salt
- 2 tbs harissa
- 1 tbs agave syrup
- ½ tbs apple cider vinegar

1. Add the oil to a small saucepan and set on a medium heat. Once hot, add the garlic and fry for a minute or two, until beginning to soften.

2. Add the peanuts and sesame seeds, and fry for another a minute or two, until the garlic is beginning to turn golden and the colour of the nuts has deepened.

3. Decant into a heatproof bowl and stir in the remaining ingredients. Allow to cool before decanting into a jar and transferring to the fridge.

FRIDGE LIFE: **a month**



FOR HEARTY STEWS

Barberry, coriander and orange gremolata

This is just what you need for sprinkling over rich dishes in need of a lift. I love it on hearty braised beef stews or lentils or a roast leg of lamb especially. Barberries are tart little berries that just cut through rich dishes so perfectly, and can be found at Middle Eastern grocers. You can also use goji berries if barberries aren't available.

- 30g dried barberries
- 30g finely chopped coriander
- Zest of an orange
- 1 garlic clove, finely grated
- Zest of a lime
- ½ tsp sea salt

1. Soak the barberries in boiling water for 10 minutes before draining and combining in a bowl with the rest of the ingredients.

FRIDGE LIFE: **two days**

FOR CURRIES, CHEESE AND ROAST VEG

Sumac seeni sambol

Straight after leaving my role as executive chef at Bubala, I went on an *Eat Pray Love* trip to Sri Lanka that actually ended up being more eat, eat, eat. Somehow, I found myself doing a pop-up where I was staying, and subbed in this tangy Sri Lankan condiment for one of my dishes that I'd usually serve with caramelised onions and sumac. It was revelatory, and here I've combined the two for something extra tangy and layered. Use this as you would a chutney on the usual suspects, but I also love this served on roasted vegetables with some tahini sauce. This recipe makes quite a lot, however, feel free to halve it. Curry leaves can be a little tricky to track down – I generally buy a load to store in the freezer where they keep really well.

- 4 tbs coconut oil (olive oil is also fine)
- 40 fresh curry leaves
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 4 cloves
- 10 cardamom pods, gently crushed
- ½ tbs yellow mustard seeds
- 3 green bird's eye chillies, finely sliced
- 1kg red onions, peeled and finely sliced
- ¾ tbs table salt
- 2 tbs brown sugar
- 2 tbs tamarind paste
- 2 tbs sumac

1. Set a wide non-stick pan on a medium heat and add the coconut oil. Once melted, add the curry leaves, cinnamon stick, cloves, cardamom, mustard seeds and chillies. Stir and cook for about a minute, until the curry leaves crisp up.

2. Add the onions and salt, stir and turn the heat down to low. Cover for 15 minutes to allow the onions to soften.

3. Remove the lid and continue cooking the onions for a further 45 to 55 minutes or so, stirring regularly, until they are completely soft and jammy.

4. Stir in the sugar, tamarind paste and sumac, and simmer for a further two minutes until they're all dissolved. Turn off the heat and transfer to a tub to cool before refrigerating.

FRIDGE LIFE: **a month** · 🌶🌶

SETTLE IN FOR WINTER

With the Christmas frenzy out of the way, now is the season for intimate meals at London restaurants that want you to linger

There's something undeniably restorative about settling in for a leisurely meal at a nice restaurant. Time passes gently. Conversation flows easily. Each dish is savoured rather than rushed. January, as it happens, was made for meals like this. Following the frenzy of the festive season, the start of a new year brings with it a slower rhythm and looser schedules. It's an energy that restaurants are eager to match. During this quieter period, reservations that might have been impossible to make in December are now a bit easier to secure, and a thoughtful maître d' will do everything in their power to ensure you have your table for longer.

In partnership with OpenTable, we're highlighting a selection of standout London restaurants that are smart destinations for a long meal. Each one offers generous table times, excellent service and a welcoming atmosphere that encourages guests to slow down. If you're looking to schedule that catch-up you never got round to in the festive run-up, or simply treat yourself after time spent catering to others, these are ideal places to settle in for a few hours.

POON'S AT SOMERSET HOUSE

"This is a way of welcoming people to my table – it's where you come if you don't have a nice Chinese friend who will cook for you at home," is how Amy Poon describes her new restaurant Poon's at Somerset House. And she's not wrong. Going for lunch or dinner at Poon's is akin to visiting a stylish friend's place for a proper home-cooked Chinese meal, just one with an extensive tea selection and fantastic wine list. You want to take your time to enjoy the food and then linger for a while.

YUKI SAGURA

This attitude very much informed the design and atmosphere of the restaurant: a range of comfortable seating to fit everyone from solo diners (of which there are many) to couples and big groups. And an actual library filled with books on Chinese cooking, culture and art, with guests encouraged to take a look and find a book to read. It's the sort of place where you could easily come in at midday and stay until 4pm.

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THE ORIGINAL IVY, WEST END

The Ivy has been delivering excellent fine dining for more than a century and it shows – in the service, in the food and in the warm but sophisticated atmosphere its team has curated. With its stained-glass windows, cosy banquettes, intimate layout and the centrepiece art-deco bar, it's a restaurant you'll want to book for a long visit. Fortunately, their generous table times easily accommodate such meals.

"Usually the turn time is two hours over here but in January, to be honest, the restaurant is embracing [even longer visits]," says general manager Hector Hernandez, who adds that the extended times reflect the calm of the new year. People want to settle in over good comfort food, something The Ivy excels at during the colder months, the famous shepherd's pie for instance. None of this cosiness comes at the expense of glamour, though – there's a bit of showmanship in the form of dishes like the dover sole, which is filleted at the table, the baked Alaska and, of course, the martini trolley.

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THE CONNAUGHT GRILL

THE CONNAUGHT

The Connaught Grill is an unmistakably glamorous, old-school restaurant, which makes sense given it calls one of London's most luxurious hotels home. Yet that elegance doesn't come at the cost of comfort and cosiness. Guests are greeted by the warmth and glow of a roaring fire, the aroma of the wood-burning grill, the bustle of the open kitchen and attentive service. It's the kind of place that naturally invites you to settle in for a while.

"We generally do at least two hours for a table of two, which encourages a leisurely pace so you can enjoy the food, enjoy the wine, enjoy the service," says food and beverage director Andreas Cortes.

January is an especially good time to visit. The restaurant marks Burns Night with a celebration of Scottish produce, often paired with whisky tastings that tie into the game-focused menus it offers. But the luxe comfort food and cosy atmosphere make it ideal for long dinners and unhurried weekend lunches throughout the month. Sunday lunch is an occasion in itself. "For me Sunday roast is a very long, leisurely thing," says Cortes. "You have your roast, you take your time, you're chatting. There's no rush to go anywhere."

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CORRIGAN'S

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Home to chef Richard Corrigan, Mayfair stalwart Corrigan's offers a modern British and Irish menu perfectly suited to winter dining, as well as a bit of tableside theatre, all of which encourages guests to settle in for at least a couple of hours. The space feels like a sophisticated country hunting lodge, full of cosy corners and semi-private areas, and the table times allotted to guests is generous, with large groups typically holding their tables for the whole evening.

The classics are always popular, says managing director Richard Corrigan Jr, who points to the Scottish wood pigeon and other game dishes as being a real favourite at this time of year. But it's the trolley items that draw guests in. "People really like seeing what comes from the trolley, which is why we serve different cuts of beef there – salt-aged beef wellington for two, a côte de boeuf… Customers really love that table service… It's a nice, interactive experience."

> *'You have your roast, you take your time, you're chatting. There's no rush to go anywhere'*

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HAWKSMOOR BOROUGH

Hawksmoor's south-of-the-river outpost may sit right in the middle of Borough Market, just moments from London Bridge, but you wouldn't know it once you're inside. Housed in a converted hops warehouse, the steakhouse feels pleasantly removed from the hustle and bustle of its surroundings, making it a lovely place to escape for a few unrushed hours. The table allocation is two hours for groups of up to four, and two and a half hours for five or more guests, but general manager Tom Foxwell notes that this only really applies during peak periods.

Everything from the layout of the restaurant to the nature of the food and how it's served lends itself to settling in and relaxing over a meal. Steaks like the chateaubriand and porterhouse naturally take time to savour and work through, making a long, leisurely lunch or dinner a foregone conclusion.

GAUTHIER

GAUTHIER SOHO

If you want to linger over a beautiful plant-based meal but you're also after a luxury fine-dining experience, Gauthier is the place to go. The sumptuous Soho restaurant, inside a lovely old Georgian townhouse, has a welcoming atmosphere and the staff-to-guests ratio is far higher than in similar restaurants in its price range, says creative development manager James Lewis. Gauthier offers two types of sittings: a two-hour one for a smaller tasting menu and three hours for the larger menu. And while the vegan menu is a draw year-round, it's even more popular in January, notes Lewis. "With Veganuary, we get a lot of customers coming for dinner to celebrate that month."

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COUNTER 71

PERCY WALKER-SMITH

It doesn't get much more intimate than this, a former pub turned 16-seat counter restaurant in Shoreditch. The team hosts just one chef's table-style dinner service, starting at 7.30pm, with all guests dining together from the same 10-course tasting menu of modern British cuisine. It allows for a relaxed meal and gives the team time to engage with guests – something especially appreciated by solo diners.

On Saturdays, there's a shorter seven-course tasting menu for lunch, starting at 12.30pm, but guests tend to linger long after the final course. "We often find people staying until about 4pm if they're having drinks or coffee," says general manager/sommelier Harry Cooper. "After that they're welcome to come downstairs and meander into the evening with a few cocktails." A particular draw in January will be its strong low- and no-alcohol programme.

For reservations, visit opentable.com

The three-day dinner party

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PERSONAL
COPY

BY Jay Rayner

PHOTOGRAPHY BY Joseph Horton • PROP STYLING BY Jennifer Kay

When the days are nasty, brutish and short, there's only one thing for it: we must cook. A lot. This, after all, is the season for new adventures; for embracing the thing we wouldn't normally embrace, and for refusing to go gentle into that dark-at-4pm night. Far better to bring purpose and meaning into the year's start with an outrageously involved cooking project. ☞

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London's three-day restaurant dishes

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By Harriet Fitch Little

The miso black cod, **ZUMA**'s most celebrated dish, only takes 10 minutes to cook, but that's subsequent to a three-day marinade in mirin, miso and sake.

At **CAMILLE**, almost all elements of the snout cassoulet require a multi-day process, not least the pig snout itself, which is brined for two days then braised overnight before pan frying. Chef Elliot Hashtroudi describes it as a "confronting but delicious dish".

Both the herb oil and shiitake mushrooms for **FALLOW**'s mushroom parfait take 48 hours to infuse/marinade. And the shallots take 24 hours to pickle. But the dish is such a favourite it's never come off the menu.

64 GOODGE STREET goes big on sauces, including the three-day sauce zingara, which involves making chicken stock, which is used to make beef stock, which is used in turn to make beef sauce.

At **QUALITY WINES**, it's the sandwiches that take serious time. Both the bollito misto and turkey sandwiches require a process of curing, then cooking over three days – braising then reheating in stock for the beef, poaching then roasting for the turkey.

TOO OFTEN, OF COURSE, WE THINK OF FOOD PREPARATION as a destination. We cook to eat. But when it's done properly the cooking becomes an end in itself. What I propose, therefore, is a three-course dinner requiring multiple stages of prep, full of graft and greedy anticipation, something that will put me in the kitchen for three days.

It will, however, take longer than that because there will also be lots of hungry thought experiments. In an age infected by cookbooks with words like "express" or "speedy" in the title, falsely promising great results in the time it takes to feed the cat, it's a joy to go where the real action is: the lengthy and the slow. Because slow cookery is the route to flavour. It's about the delicious algebra of ingredients multiplied by time.

We need to start with something fresh and bright as a defence against the January darkness. That means pickles. With those I will whip up a dish of that Lyonnaise speciality cervelle de canut, which translates as "silk workers' brains" in celebration of Lyon's venerable silk trade, though no silk workers will be harmed in its making. It demands draining cheese curds overnight, then spinning them up with vinegar, olive oil and handfuls of fresh herbs and garlic. That will kick off this dinner. For the main course it has to be a cassoulet. It is the *ne plus ultra* of the long cooking project. Even just acquiring the ingredients has about it the dynamic of the mythical quest. It's something we should all do at least once, and if not now then when?

For these dishes I will obviously need recipes, but rather than sticking slavishly to one person's edicts I have a habit of reviewing the literature and devising my own. One recipe for cervelle de canut insists it be made with fromage blanc "preferably from a farm". Well, where else would it come from? A zoo? Others insist cottage cheese is a good stunt double for the less readily available fromage blanc. One cassoulet recipe demands adding gelatine for the requisite stickiness. That seems silly. Just use good stock. The recipe by the late Richard Olney, a grandee of food writers, insists a mutton shoulder should be involved. Absolutely not. Mine will be all about pork and duck.

RIGHT: fresh and bright pickled vegetables to ward off 'January darkness'

For dessert, however, I will indeed use someone else's recipe. I want to make a Basque cheesecake. God knows, I've eaten enough of them in restaurants, where it has become the default dessert for kitchens without dedicated pastry sections. I want to get under the hood of this dish, and partner it with a spiced fruit compote. Happily, my friend James "Jocky" Petrie, now global culinary director of The Fat Duck and one of the world's great pastry chefs, has a Basque cheesecake recipe to hand.

Apparently, it results in a cake weighing over 1.8kg. Good. If you're going to cook for multiple days, it's not a moment for mimsy portions. It is a time for largesse, seconds and leftovers. What follows, therefore, is an account of three selfless days in the kitchen producing enough food to feed at least eight people. Because this is what everyone needs in January: a sense of the world turning on its axis through the medium of slow-cooked ingredients.

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DAY ZERO

I spend the morning researching recipes, both silly and clever, and writing both a timetable and a shopping list, the tip of my tongue caught between my teeth in concentration. I intend to buy everything in one go. My plan almost falls apart before it's begun when it transpires that my most dependable local shop in Herne Hill isn't quite as dependable as I thought. They don't have quinces today, a vital part of the project's fantasy finale. Another shopper hears my squeals of disappointment. She volunteers that she has a basket full of them if I'd be happy to visit her home, just up the road. Mary is, of course, a woman of exquisite good taste and therefore an avid FT reader. She is delighted to be a part of this project. By early afternoon I have my quinces.

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DAY ONE

A relaxed cooking day. If you are confiting your own duck legs, this is where the two-day process starts – you need to start salting them now. Otherwise, it's all about the starter. While a mixture of vinegar, water, sugar and salt gently simmers away on the hob, I slice up my vegetables including the radishes, which will turn it all a lovely pink. Those will be reasonably pickled after 24 hours, but will be far better after two days. Meanwhile, I decant cottage cheese into a sieve over a bowl and put it in the fridge to drain overnight. I hate cottage cheese. I have always hated cottage cheese. But, apparently, it really is the best alternative to fromage blanc. Will this be a cottage cheese dish I actually like? Time will literally tell.

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DAY TWO

I awake, my head bubbling with tasks that need starting and finishing because there's now a full morning's cooking ahead. If you're confiting the duck legs for the cassoulet they need to go in the fat, and the beans must start their 24-hour soak. I whip the cottage cheese to break down the curds, chop the shallot and herbs and mix them with all the other ingredients to make the cervelle de canut. That goes back in the fridge overnight. I peel my neighbour's quinces and some Bramley apples for the spiced compote which, when finished, will also benefit from a night in the fridge. And then there is Jocky's Basque cheesecake recipe. It feels wrong to whack such a huge cake mix in the oven on such a high temperature for such a short period of time. Still, at the end it looks right. The surface is nice and dark. Now I just have to wait. I will not know whether it has set until the knife goes in more than 24 hours from now. I play fridge *Tetris* for an hour. A three-day cooking project requires significant fridge space. I am very happy in my work. My family tolerates the way I have occupied the kitchen. Just about.

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DAY THREE

The great project is finally coming to fruition. The soaked beans for the cassoulet must be drained and simmered for 45 minutes. Meanwhile, I'm browning the various meats. Then it's a case of bringing it all together and shoving it in the oven. I bring it out now and then to push the browned gelatine crust back under the surface. The true joy of long-cooked dishes becomes clear: the house smells wonderful.

At which point it strikes me. Obviously, I've done serious work over the past few days, but now my neighbours are coming over for dinner, there is little left for me to do, save make some toast to go with the cervelle de canut and pickles – thank God I declined to make my own bread – and knock up a green salad to go with the cassoulet.

And how is it all? Honestly, a triumph. Go me. The salty-sour, herb-rich cervelle de canut is indeed the one good use for cottage cheese. The pickles are crisp and have just the right balance of vinegar to sweet. The cassoulet is the sort of dish perfectly engineered for a bitter winter on the Russian steppe, or perhaps just January. It is the friendly meeting place of carbs and pig, with a back note of collapsed duck confit. The quinces and apples are sticky with syrup and heady with spice. And the Basque cheesecake? Well, it's loose in the middle but that's how we want it. Too often, Basque cheesecake can be dry. This is anything but. I have hugely enjoyed my three-day dinner party project. What's more, my guests heap me with praise for enjoying myself. Now I need a lie down.

Quick pickled vegetables

- A mixture of vegetables of your choice, about 600g-750g in total, including:
  - 2 carrots, peeled, and cut into batons
  - ½ a cucumber, split in half, the central seeds removed with a teaspoon, and cut into batons
  - 6-8 radishes, topped, tailed and halved
  - a handful of cauliflower florets, broken into small pieces
- A clove of garlic, peeled and cut in half
- A few sprigs of fresh tarragon (optional)

FOR THE PICKLING LIQUOR

- 400ml white wine vinegar
- 200ml water
- 100g caster sugar
- 50g salt

If a greater volume is required, make this mixture on a ratio of 100 per cent vinegar to 50 per cent water to 25 per cent sugar to 12.5 per cent salt.

1. Put the ingredients for the pickling liquor in a pan and gently heat, stirring occasionally until the sugar and salt have dissolved. Simmer for a couple of minutes, then leave to cool for 10 minutes. It doesn't have to be totally cold before use.

ABOVE: Jay's salty-sour, herb-rich cervelle de canut to kick off dinner

2. Put your raw vegetables in a jar or plastic box with a lid, add the garlic clove and tarragon if using and pour over the pickling liquor to cover. Refrigerate for at least 24 hours, but ideally two days. They will keep for at least two weeks. If they survive that long.

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Cervelle de canut

- 500g cottage cheese (undrained weight)
- 200g crème fraîche
- 2 tbs white wine vinegar
- 3 tbs olive oil
- 2 medium (or 3 small) garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 1 small to medium banana shallot, finely chopped

ABOVE: cassoulet, 'perfectly engineered for a bitter winter on the Russian steppe'

- 2 tbs flatleaf parsley, finely chopped
- 2 tbs chives, finely chopped
- 2 tbs tarragon, chervil or basil, finely chopped
- Salt and pepper

1 Put the cottage cheese in a sieve over a bowl to drain in the fridge overnight.

2 The next day, whip the drained cottage cheese in a bowl for three minutes to break up the curds. Add the crème fraîche and whip for another 10-15 seconds to incorporate.

3 Add the vinegar and olive oil and whip again for about 30 seconds to incorporate.

4 Add the garlic, chopped shallot and herbs and use a spoon to mix them into the cheese mix. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Refrigerate covered overnight (if you don't cover it, your fridge will smell only of that).

Cassoulet

FOR THE DUCK CONFIT

- 4 duck legs
- 50g sea salt
- 1l duck fat

Or 4 ready-confited duck legs, if you choose not to do it yourself

- 800g-1kg dried cannellini beans
- 60g sea salt plus extra
- 1 clove of garlic, cut in half
- 8 sprigs of thyme
- 250g-350g salt pork or pancetta in a block, skin removed and cut into thumb-sized pieces
- 750g pork belly strips, cut into 6cm-8cm chunks
- 6 large Toulouse sausages
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- 1 large carrot, finely chopped
- 2 sticks celery, finely chopped
- 1.5l real chicken stock (rather than from a stock cube or gel pot)
- Black pepper, freshly ground

If making your own duck confit, two days before serving put the legs in a bowl, rub in the salt, cover with a tea towel and chill overnight. The day before you want to serve the cassoulet, wipe any excess salt off the duck legs with kitchen paper. Melt the duck fat in a pan, submerge the legs in the fat and cook over a very low heat for an hour and a half. The legs are ready when a wooden skewer goes in easily. Leave the legs in the fat to cool overnight.

1 Put the beans in four litres of water with 60g of sea salt and leave to soak overnight.

2 The next morning, drain and rinse the beans, then put them in a pan with enough water to cover, add the cut garlic clove and three sprigs of thyme and bring to a simmer. Cook for 45 minutes, occasionally skimming off any scum. Drain and rinse. While the beans are cooking, preheat the oven to 160C.

3 In a large, dry casserole pan, gently sear the confit duck legs. They should have enough fat clinging to them to cook everything else. When browned, remove to a dish, add the pieces of salt pork or pancetta to the pan and brown those too before removing them to the same dish.

4 Very lightly season the pork belly pieces with kitchen salt and brown those too. Remove them. Finally, cut the sausages in half and gently brown them. They don't need to be cooked through, they just need a little colour. Remove them to the dish.

5 Add the chopped onion, carrot and celery to the pan and sauté over a medium heat, scraping up any crispy bits on the bottom of the pan. After five minutes, when the vegetables have just started to colour, add half the beans and mix all the ingredients together.

6 Now return your various meats to the pan, tucking them in under the beans gently. When you're starting to run out of space, add 500ml of the stock and gently mix it all together again. Add the rest of the beans and tuck in the rest of the meat. Add another 750ml of stock, season with a generous amount of cracked black pepper (but no salt), add the remaining sprigs of thyme and bring to the lightest of simmers.

7 Put in the oven uncovered. After 90 minutes bring it out. A crust, from the gelatine in the stock and duck bones, will have developed. Push that back under the surface. Repeat the process every 30 minutes for the next 90 minutes. If at any time the pan looks dry, add a little extra stock.

8 Serve with a green salad.

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Spiced stewed quinces and Bramley apples

- Juice of two lemons
- 600g-700g quinces
- 300ml dry white wine
- 500g caster sugar
- 300g Bramley apples
- A cinnamon stick, broken in two
- 3-4 cloves
- 2 bay leaves
- A slice of ginger

1 Fill a mixing bowl with water and add the lemon juice. This will be for the quince slices and will stop them from going brown. (Though if the fruit is a little aged, it may already be brown. Don't worry about it.)

2 Peel the quinces and reserve the peel. Core, then slice them into thick pieces and put them in the acidulated water.

3 Put the wine in a saucepan with 200ml of cold water and the sugar. Heat over medium until the sugar has dissolved, then bring to the boil for a couple of minutes.

4 Turn the heat back down to medium and add the reserved quince peel. Simmer gently for 20 minutes. Meanwhile peel, core and slice the Bramley apples and add those to the water.

5 When the 20 minutes are up, strain the syrup into a new saucepan. Add the strained fruit, the broken cinnamon stick, the cloves, bay leaves and ginger, and simmer gently for 20 to 30 minutes, or until the quince is tender. How long this takes will depend on the age of your fruit. The apples will break up long before the quince is cooked but will add to the flavour and texture of the syrup.

6 When the fruit is cooked, transfer with the syrup to a bowl. Let it cool for a few minutes then put it in the fridge covered overnight so the flavours can develop.

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James 'Jocky' Petrie's Basque cheesecake

- 1kg cream cheese. While other brands are available, you'll probably use Philadelphia, which helpfully often comes in 165g packs in the UK. Six of those come to 990g. That is fine.
- 2 whole eggs
- 5 egg yolks
- 400g sour cream
- 1 tsp vanilla essence
- 450g caster sugar
- 35g cornflour
- 3g table salt

1 Preheat your oven as high as it will go, which will probably be about 240C.

2 Lightly oil a spring-loaded cake tin measuring 24cm across by 5cm deep. Double-line with greaseproof paper, by cutting out two squares of paper which are big enough so the corners will go well over the rim when you press the first one in roughly. Press the second square in so its corners come up above the rim of the tin between those of the first. It should look rustic, rather than tidy and elegant.

3 If it's not a single 1kg lump, briefly whisk the cream cheese to bring together the separate pats, then whisk again with all the eggs. Add the sour cream and vanilla essence and whisk for two minutes until incorporated.

4 Mix the sugar, cornflour and salt in a separate bowl, then gradually add to the cream cheese mix while whisking continually, until all the dry ingredients have been incorporated.

5 Put the lined cake tin on a tray and then on to a rack pulled halfway out of the opened oven. Pour in the cheesecake mix, push it in and close the door.

6 Bake for 30 minutes. Check after 20. If the browning of the top is uneven from front to back, turn the cake around in the oven for the last 10 minutes.

7 Cool at room temperature then somehow find space in the fridge and leave it there overnight to set. This will give the cheesecake a loose, gooey middle. ◆

ABOVE: peeling quinces to join Bramley apples in a 'sticky, heady' spiced fruit compote

> *I play fridge 'Tetris' for an hour. My family tolerates the way I have occupied the kitchen. Just about*

A shrub for all seasons

*Add flavour, warmth – and vinegar – to your non-alcoholic repertoire. By **Najmieh Batmanglij***

THE MODERN POPULARITY OF SHRUBS, HOME-MADE syrups and botanical cocktails has ancient roots. In Iran, centuries ago, after wine faded from public life with the advent of Islam, Iranians channelled their creativity into sharbat: fragrant syrups of fruit, herbs and flowers poured over ice or snow. From these snow-cooled drinks came a family of beverages and frozen treats that eventually travelled the world. When British sailors adopted the sharbat in the 17th century, they preserved citrus juice by blending it with rum or brandy, and called the resulting mixture a shrub. By the 18th and 19th centuries, vinegar-based fruit shrubs had appeared in Britain and America, where they were poured into spirits for punch or simply mixed with water for a refreshing non-alcoholic drink. Today's shrubs return to that flexible lineage: bright, tangy syrups that work just as well spirit-free as they do in cocktails.

Sharbats and shrubs are known as summer drinks, but they can become heartwarming winter warmers with a touch of heat, aromatic flowers and spices recalling the perfumes of a Persian garden.

A deceptively simple drink, a shrub or sharbat is made up of three elements:

- a fruit juice (and/or floral or herbal infusion)
- a sweetener such as sugar, honey, grape molasses or date molasses
- vinegar (or citrus in the case of sharbat). Wine, apple cider or champagne vinegar all work well

Consider these recipes starting points for your own seasonal adventures.

Barberry sharbat

FOR THE BARBERRY JUICE

- 150g dried barberries
- 600ml water

FOR THE SYRUP

- 240ml barberry juice
- 200g granulated sugar
- 60ml lime juice
- 1 tsp ground golpar (Persian hogweed seeds)
- 1 tsp rosewater
- 4 cardamom pods
- ¼ tsp cayenne or ½ tsp red pepper flakes
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 1 dried Persian lime (limu omani), cut in half
- ⅛ tsp ground saffron or ¼ tsp turmeric (optional)

1. To make the barberry juice, remove and discard any stems or bad berries. Soak barberries in water for 20 minutes, strain and rinse thoroughly. Then combine the barberries with 600ml of water in a medium, non-reactive saucepan, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium, and boil for 15 minutes. Remove from the heat, and allow to cool for 10 minutes. Pass through two layers of cheesecloth, squeezing out as much of the juice as possible into the saucepan.
2. Add the sugar, lime juice, golpar, rosewater, cardamom pods, cayenne, cinnamon, dried lime and saffron, if using. Bring back to boil, reduce heat to medium low, and allow to simmer for 30 to 40 minutes until a thick syrup forms.
3. Remove from the heat, cover and allow to steep for two hours. Strain, bottle and store in the fridge for up to three months.
4. To drink, add three parts water to one part syrup. Or use this as a base for making other drinks.

Mulled vinegar shrub

- 400g granulated sugar
- 240ml water
- 120ml apple cider vinegar
- 120ml fresh lime juice
- 2 dried Persian limes (limu omani), cut in half
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 1 tsp coriander seeds
- Large thumb of fresh ginger, sliced, or ½ tsp ginger powder
- 3 sprigs of fresh mint

1. For the syrup: combine the sugar and water in a medium-sized, non-reactive saucepan and stir well. Bring to boil over medium heat (about 10 minutes).
2. Add the vinegar, lime juice, dried Persian lime, cinnamon, coriander seeds, ginger and mint.
3. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer for 30 to 40 minutes until a thick syrup forms. Turn off the heat, cover and allow to steep for two hours.
4. Strain, bottle and store in the fridge for up to three months.
5. To serve the shrub, combine one part syrup and three parts boiling water. Adjust seasoning to taste by adding a squeeze of lime or more syrup.
6. Garnish with a strip of lime peel (no pith) and rose petals.

VARIATIONS

- You can substitute the sugar with honey, date molasses or grape molasses. Replace every 100g of sugar with 75g honey or date molasses. For grape molasses, use the same amount as the sugar.
- Replace fresh mint with lemon verbena, basil or rosemary.
- Replace barberry juice with pure pomegranate juice, sour cherry juice or cranberry juice.
- Replace dried lime with 1 tsp zest of lime and zest of orange.

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Shrubs in the city

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By Harriet Fitch Little

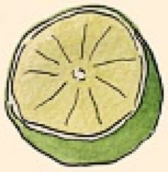
The ever-popular **BERENJAK**, now an international chain, has a full menu of sharbats including sour cherry, black limes and pomegranate. Plus an alcoholic version based on elderflower.

The non-alcoholic menu at **CONTROL ROOM B**, the cocktail bar inside London's Battersea Power Station's control room (still with original fittings), includes the double-shrub Circuit Breaker, with a base of both strawberry and blood orange/bitter lemon.

Heston Blumenthal's creativity at **THE FAT DUCK** in Bray extends beyond the 12-course tasting menu. You'll also find a clementine shrub with apple cider vinegar, hazelnuts and ginger ale.

The charming Peckham deli **PERSEPOLIS** is crammed with tables to enjoy the offerings on-site, including a range of sharbats that can be topped up with water or milk.

DISHOOM has several sharbats on the menu including the Kala Khatta made with kokum fruit and chilli.



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